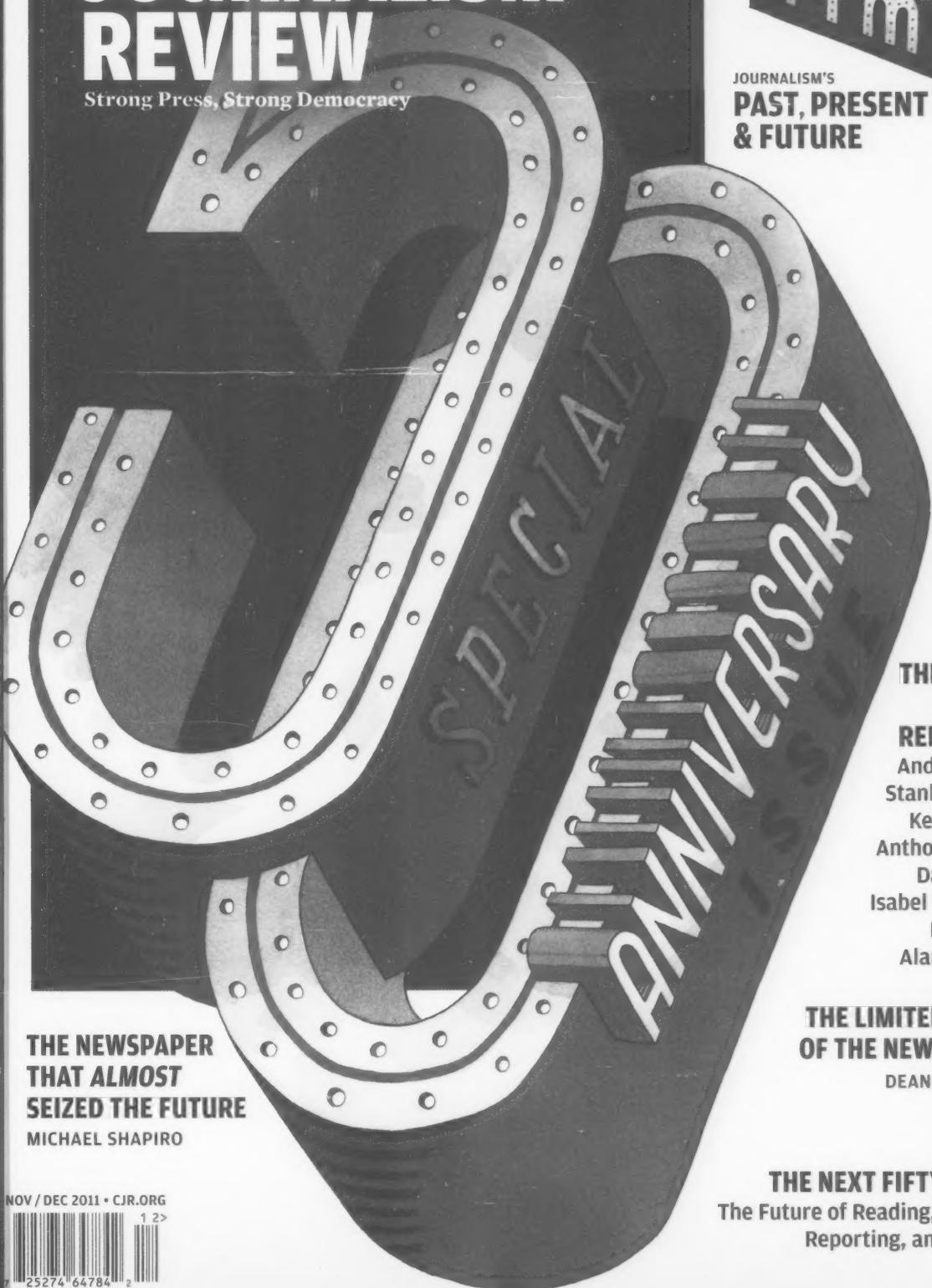


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TIME
JOURNALISM'S
PAST, PRESENT
& FUTURE



THE NEWSPAPER
THAT ALMOST
SEIZED THE FUTURE
MICHAEL SHAPIRO

NOV / DEC 2011 • CJR.ORG

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THE ART OF
GREAT
REPORTING
Andrea Bruce
Stanley Nelson
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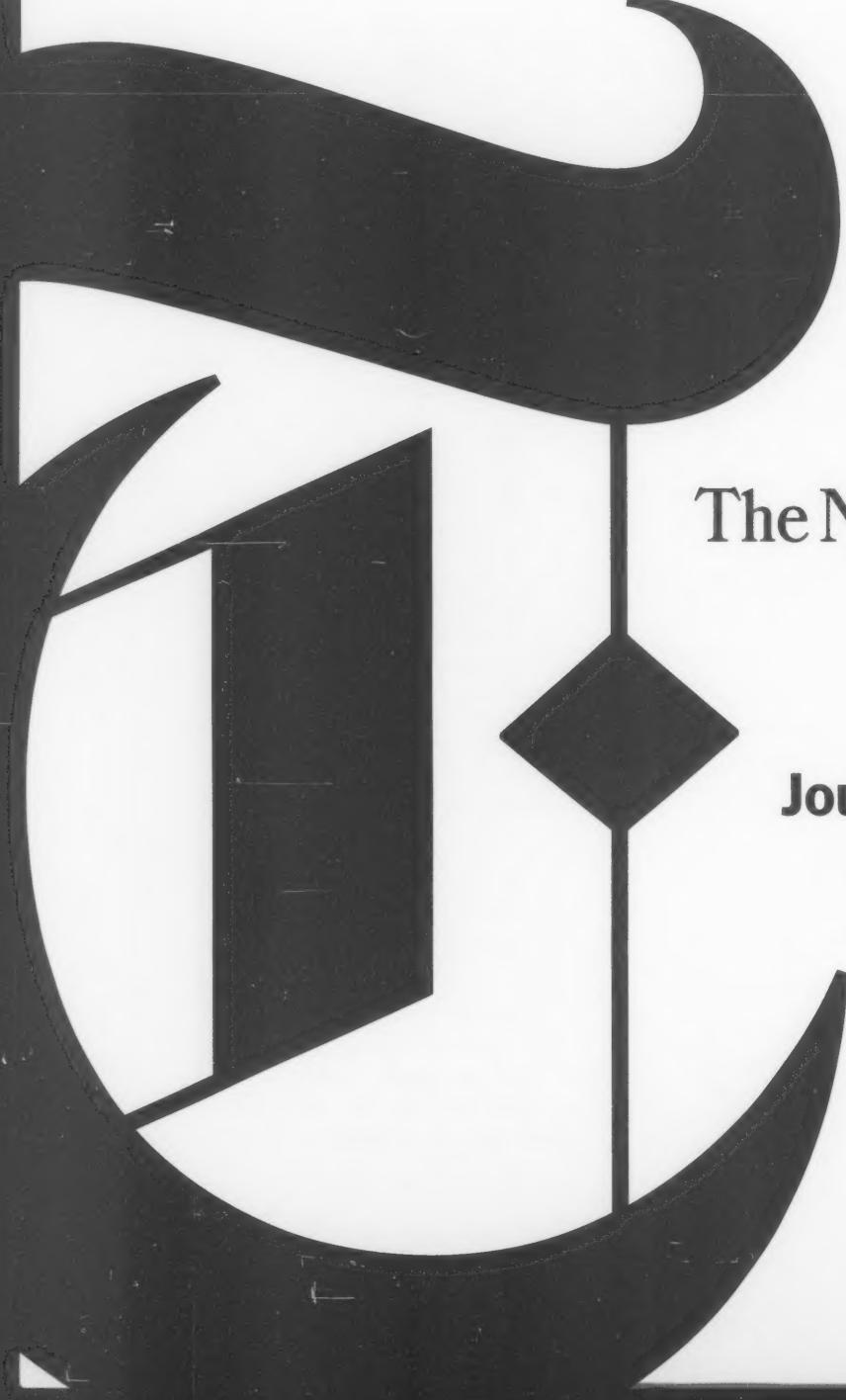
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November/December 2011



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—from the founding editorial, 1961



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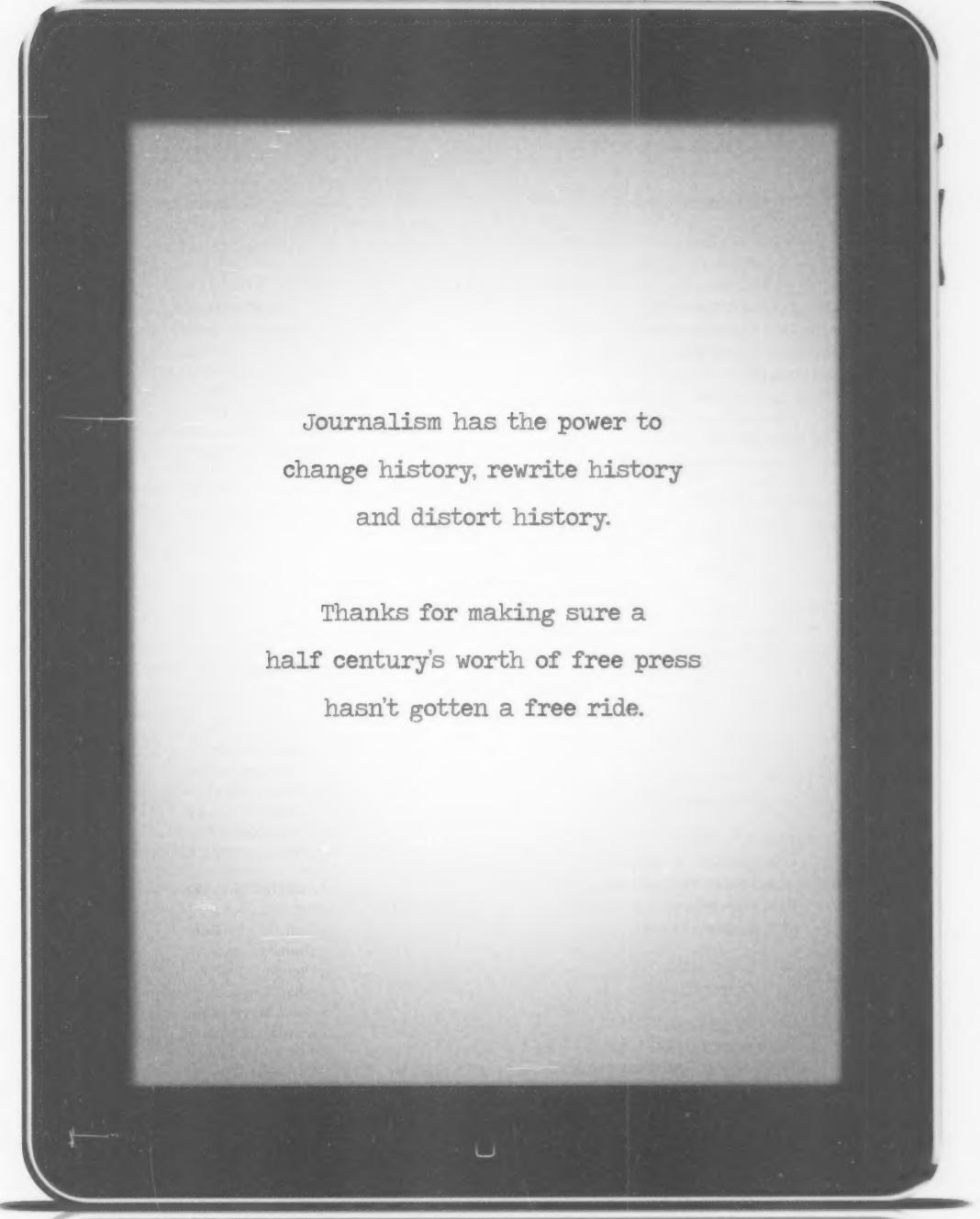
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Opening Shot



CJR's debut was mostly greeted with "bouquets," though a few readers, our second issue noted, "reacted with unblemished hostility." You can't please everyone, especially in this job. Still, we are alive. Pop a cork and consider the times—some too recent to admit—we flirted with death. Toast our many reanimators, who emerged when CJR needed them. And boy, have we needed them. In an issue full of hosannas, let this space provide some balance: there was the foundation that stanchéd insolvency, and, two years later, was told the circulation numbers had been cooked. An editor was dismissed after a year of late issues. (From the publisher's signed kiss-off: he "had incredible and continuing trouble in managing things and people." Yikes.) Maybe we should stop there. But before draining that glass, pour some out for others—*MORE*; *Buncombe*; *Thorn*; *Press On*; *The Unsatisfied Man*; *Brill's Content*; the Chicago, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Oregon, and Hawaii journalism reviews—that didn't make it. And drink to the new voices, online and elsewhere, keeping the press honest. To the next fifty. **CJR**

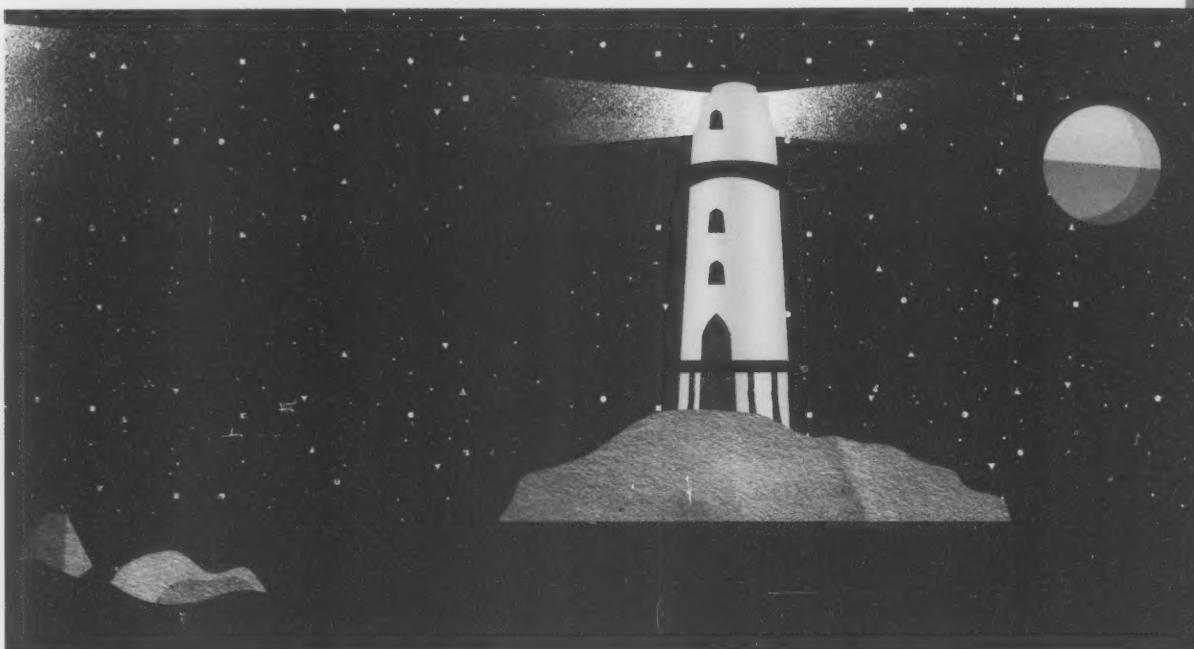
Shock to the system Edward Sorel drew the above for our twenty-fifth anniversary issue. We thank him for allowing us to revive it. The original caption: "October, 1961. To the surprise of some, the Columbia Journalism Review is born."

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The Complications of Our Age

What we want is a journalism to match them

When the idea of a publication to be called the *Columbia Journalism Review* first came up, our founding editor tells us (page 42), some journalists and journalism professors were deeply opposed to the idea of turning the weapon of criticism on journalism itself. Doesn't the craft require support rather than criticism? Doesn't it have enemies enough?

Such questions still have life. Several months ago, at the peak of a brutal season of newsroom layoffs around the country, a *New York Times* reporter e-mailed us to compare CJR critiques to bullets aimed at the moaning wounded after a bloody battle. Shouldn't CJR, he reasoned, be in the journalism-support business rather than in the journalism-bashing business, especially now?

The thought deserves unpacking. Our first reply is that journalism requires support *and* criticism, including—and this is key—support *through* criticism. And not from an “enemy.” Do you listen to an enemy? Not really. You listen to a friend,

because you know a friend wants you at your best.

It is in that spirit—a friend and supporter of great journalism—that we approach our work, and hope to continue to approach it for another fifty years.

That is not to say that the nuances of the mission haven't changed. A large part of the job is helping to advance a discussion about: What now? Which journalistic standards and practices and forms and traditions should be abandoned in a time of amazing change, and which ones should be held fast? Even beyond that, we are in a period when the very definition of journalism, who does it, and how it might pay for itself (or not), are questions on the table.

So we take a wide view of the word “criticism” as both the art of analyzing journalism to try to improve it, and also helping the community that cares about it think through its many challenges. Jim Boylan's editorial from the fall of 1961, reprinted alongside this one, poses a question, “Why a Review of Journalism?” We have published part of the answer he supplied in our pages for years: “To assess the performance...to help stimulate continuing improvement in

Why a Review of Journalism?

The arguments for a critical journal far outweigh the hazards



the profession...."

But another reason is suggested two paragraphs later, where the editorial speaks of "the probability that journalism of all types is not yet a match for the complications of our age."

The world was complicated in 1961. The Soviet Union built a wall dividing Berlin. President Eisenhower talked about a "military-industrial complex." John Kennedy promised the moon. Freedom Riders traveled the South. Roger Maris hit sixty-one home runs. "Moon River" was on the radio, and so were The Shirelles. Joseph Heller published *Catch-22*. Barbie got Ken.

But the world is more complicated now—no need for details to make the case; we all know it. What we want, and what we trust that our readers want, is journalism that is "a match for the complications of our age." It's a tall order, but that just heightens the verve and—why not?—the joy with which we intend to pursue it. That both the press and the democracy feel more fragile these days only points to the centrality of the mission. So does a sense of promise beneath the ferment. We are lucky to live in interesting times. **CJR**

WHAT JOURNALISM NEEDS, IT HAS BEEN SAID TIME and again, is more and better criticism. There have been abundant proposals for professional study panels, for institutes with squads of researchers, for critical journals. Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism has decided to attempt such a journal. Two considerations brought about the decision: First, the need, magnified in a critical era like this, for some effort to assess the performance of and to help define—or redefine—standards of honest, responsible service. Second, the obligation that falls on a serious professional school—a graduate institution, national in character—to help stimulate continuing improvement in its profession and to speak out for what it considers right, fair, and decent.

Columbia's Faculty of Journalism cannot pretend to Olympian qualifications. It does combine the detachment needed to be reasonably impartial with the professional experience needed to sense what is possible and what is not. It can also draw upon the vast experience of its part-time teaching staff and its alumni, as well as upon the growing number of alert, inquiring minds within journalism and informed critics from the outside.

All the proposals for organized criticism—whatever their intent or merit—point to one conclusion: that there exists, in and out of the profession, a widespread uneasiness about the state of journalism. The *Review* shares this uneasiness, not over any supposed deterioration but over the probability that journalism of all types is not yet a match for the complications of our age. It believes that the urgent arguments for a critical journal far outweigh the hazards.

In launching this experiment, the School has set for the *Review* these goals:

To deal forthrightly with what it finds to be deficient or irresponsible and to salute what it finds to be responsible, fair, and professional.

To discuss all the means that carry news to the public, thus viewing the field whole, without the customary partitions.

To provide a meeting ground for thoughtful discussion of journalism, both by its practitioners and by observers, to encourage debate, and to provide ample space for reasonable dissent.

To attempt systematic studies of major problems in journalism, drawing not only upon published sources but upon new research and upon correspondents here and abroad, including many of the School's alumni active in the profession.

To recognize that others (like *Nieman Reports*, *Journalism Quarterly*, the *Saturday Review*, and, in some ways, trade publications like *Editor & Publisher* and *Broadcasting*) have been doing part of the job and to acknowledge their work in the *Review's* pages.

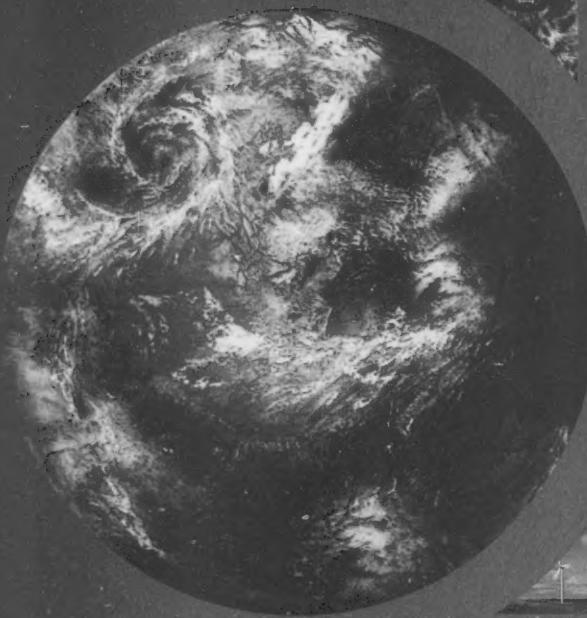
As a division of a large private university and as an institution that has mediated between the academic world and journalism for nearly fifty years, the School is committed to no single interest beyond its belief in good journalism and graduate education in journalism. The School has tried to prepare more than 2,500 graduates for careers in journalism. Now it believes it is time to try to assess the field they have entered.

No single issue of this publication will satisfy all the editors' standards—least of all this pilot effort. But the *Review* will try to emulate all sincere journalism by coming as near the whole truth as possible. **CJR**

COLUMBIA
JOURNALISM
REVIEW

Fall 1961

Editorial
Campaign coverage in retrospect—and in the future
Newspaper "moral code"—a snapshot
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Fifty Candles

Journalism the world over is in the midst of profound, transformative change, and it is not yet clear what forms will eventually emerge and become dominant.

What will not change is the importance of the function of journalism in the lives of everyone. Ordinary citizens and their leaders; the politically and economically oppressed; tycoons and Main Street merchants; the faithful and the doubters—wherever we fit in the large and small construct of humanity, we need truth-tellers.

Personally, I am grateful that the *Columbia Journalism Review* will be around to help lead us through this meteor shower of change. It's been an invaluable resource for journalists for a half century, and we need it now more than ever.

Tom Brokaw
New York, NY

Congratulations on your fiftieth anniversary. I'm proud to say I was a reader back when CJR was a tyke, moderating debates on whether it was possible to pound out a story on an electric typewriter. Perhaps you guys knew that we'd eventually wind up covering wars via Twitter, but I never had a clue, and I'm grateful you were around to help get us through all the drama. Now, I'm looking forward to reading the CJR take on news transmission by telepathy.

Gail Collins
New York, NY

My admiration for the *Columbia Journalism Review*—and the indispensable role it plays in fostering journalistic excellence—goes back more than two decades. I was a CJR intern in the summer of 1984, while a student at Columbia College.

In the short term, my summer at CJR helped inspire me to re-establish Columbia's first student newspaper, *Acta Columbiana*. In the longer term, it taught me enduring lessons about the impor-

I found myself in the magazine's sights a couple of times and came away learning something new.

tance of critical analysis in journalism and the value of a strong and free press.

CJR's commitments to engaging in fact-based criticism, fostering a vibrant marketplace of ideas, and preserving the spirit of the First Amendment in American society help make our nation's press more effective and our democracy stronger.

I congratulate CJR on five decades of imparting those values to readers and interns alike. We all look forward to at least another half century of success.

Julius Genachowski
Chairman, Federal Communications
Commission
Washington, DC

Is there anyone more thin-skinned than a reporter whose career revolves around flaying others (for only the best of reasons, of course), but who treats the most constructive (and accurate) criticism as a personal affront? On the other hand, is there any business as bitchy and as competitive as our business? When I was a kid reporter covering the Pentagon for The Associated Press in the 1960s, I grew to become, via on-the-job training, a violent critic of that senseless, murderous war. And yet, if one of the major newspapers scooped the wire with a critical story about the war, and I was ordered to match it, I can

still—more than four decades later—remember the temptation to dash into the Pentagon's public-affairs office to grab the invariable pro forma denial...and sometimes did so. You guys at CJR have a most thankless job—to tell the truth to the journalistic powers that be. I sure hope you have a dog to kick at night.

Seymour Hersh
Washington, DC

I began reading the *Columbia Journalism Review* almost with its first edition half a century ago and once I became publisher of *Newsday*, I never stopped. I'd rather miss a meal than an edition. CJR is the journalism about journalism that has inspired my own journalism over many years now. And it just keeps getting better, stronger, and more essential.

Bill Moyers
New York, NY

At a time when much of the debate around the future of journalism centers on new business models, the *Columbia Journalism Review* has been a constant reminder that journalism is so much more than a business. Since its founding, CJR has understood that a strong press is essential to a functioning democracy.

CJR has always been a fervent defender of our free press, while never letting it off the hook. We also appreciate its willingness to wade into the world of media policy, recognizing the profound impact that decisions too often made behind closed doors in Washington have on journalism in America, and consequently on the nation itself.

CJR started the same year that FCC Chairman Newton Minow delivered his famous "vast wasteland" speech. "You must re-examine some fundamentals of your industry," Minow challenged the media. "You must open your minds and open your hearts to the limitless horizons of tomorrow.... You must help prepare a generation for great decisions. You must help a great nation fulfill its future."

At its best, CJR has met that challenge, which is just as essential today as it was fifty years ago. Here's hoping you will continue to hold the media accountable and open our hearts and minds for another fifty years or more.

Craig Aaron

President and CEO, Free Press

Josh Stearns

Associate program director, Free Press

Washington, DC

I always looked forward to CJR—it was the one place where I could depend on getting real insight into real things that were going on in my world. From way back in the halcyon days when our biggest challenges simply seemed to be how to get better and better at what we did, to the really dark days when it seemed like everything we knew was disappearing, to the search for new business models, it was always fun to see what CJR had to say. And I have to say that even today, it's fun to read *The Audit*. We don't always agree, but we always like the reasoning behind the choices.

It's pretty humbling for journalists when they find themselves the subjects of journalism. The experience—which often bears little resemblance to reality—usually makes us realize just how

much we must be getting wrong. Not so with CJR. Not only were the stories accurate, they were insightful. I found myself in the magazine's sights a couple of times and always came away learning something new about myself and whatever situation I found myself in.

If CJR didn't exist, I think we should be compelled to invent it!

Amanda Bennett

Special projects editor, Bloomberg

New York, NY



The Tail Waggs the Badger
Tally the number of TV news statements that are uninformed, off-point, or just outright silly.

football, but since it involves no infraction of NCAA rules, not an eyebrow has been raised by the sports press in Madison—or anywhere else, for that matter.

It may be true that the "Scandal Beat" reporters Daniel Libit writes about in the September/October CJR focus on crumbs and ignore the muffin, as Rick Telander puts it, but an even bigger problem is that the football-crazy public in general and alumni fans in particular think the muffin is finger-lickin' good. The commercialization and corporatization of college sports, the huge amounts of money involved, and the slick marketing campaigns have made athletic departments bigger than the schools they represent. The tail is wagging the dog, and except for a few spoilsport journalists, hardly anyone sees anything wrong with that. Just win, baby!

Wisconsin's hired gun from North Carolina will play only one season in Madison, but if he takes his fellow "student athletes" to a big bowl game or, who knows, a national championship, he'll go down as the greatest Badger athlete who never set foot in a UW undergraduate classroom.

Jim Doherty

Spring Green, WI

NOTES FROM OUR ONLINE READERS

IN SEPTEMBER, ERIKA FRY, A CJR ASSISTANT EDITOR, WROTE OF HER "ESCAPE from Thailand," an ordeal that began when she was charged with criminal defamation for a story she wrote for the *Bangkok Post*, about an official accused of plagiarizing a dissertation on organic asparagus. The story drew a wide, varied response. Here's a selection of what readers had to say:

I learnt some time ago now, after more than thirty years in the media (outside Thailand) that the last people you "trust" are your employers.... Thailand is life "through the looking glass." One only needs to read a chronology of the country's history since World War II to understand that the rule of law is secondary to the rule of the gun. Honesty is an unknown commodity in Thailand and the foreigner is always treated like a trespasser. —Wayne Taylor

When in Rome, do as the Romans do.... Freedom of speech is not to be exercised without wisdom and careful tread in a culture that clearly doesn't provide liberty for it. —Michelle

Michelle, it is good to respect a culture, but corruption is not culture. In fact, it's not even Thai. —Jeff Studebaker

It's kind of pitiful that journalists in oppressive foreign environments are willing to stick their necks out to speak truth to power, but the fawning MSM here gives Obama a free pass despite the constitutional protection they enjoy.

—Padikiller

I have known several world-class musicians who have been recruited to university music schools with offers of full scholarship plus expenses (essentially the same deal that scholarship varsity athletes receive). These young musicians are not only allowed, but encouraged, to take as many outside, paid performance jobs as they can handle. Indeed, I knew some who played in the local symphony, at full wages, while in school. Why is it acceptable for an oboe player but not a football, basketball, or tennis player to earn outside income, even unrelated to the sport, while making considerable income for the university?

Peter Ross
Cumberland, RI

Talk Is Cheap

Dave Marash has been a master storyteller for half a century. "Fade to Black" (CJR, September/October) is one of his most important—and most disturbing.

Jeff Kamen
Washington, DC

If anything, David is being a little too kind in his observations (he always has been a gentleman). CNN's Jonathan Klein and his counterparts state that intelligent talk can be more informative than crafted video reporting. In theory, that may be true. Unfortunately, in practice it's a different matter. Frequently, the "talk" to be found on television news programs is utter banality. For their next project, perhaps Dave's team can tally the number of statements per hour that are uninformed, off-point, or just outright silly. I suggest purchasing a calculator that has an exponent function.

Bryan Myers
New York, NY

The irony here is so deep as to be painful. As the technology of video and television production has gotten increasingly simpler and cheaper to make, TV networks have run away from it instead of embracing it. For nearly twenty-five years, I have been preaching the gospel of the video journalist (VJ), as well as building TV networks and stations around the world based on this simple principle: give reporters laptops and cameras and show them the door. In many places in the world, this concept has been eagerly

embraced—it is both less expensive (cutting the cost by as much as 80 percent) and at the same time, it delivers far more and better material.

At the BBC, we took their national network from fielding sixty-four beta crews a day to cover the country to fielding more than a thousand cameras a day—all in the hands of BBC journalists.

At NY1 (which we built in 1990/1!), we put forty-two cameras on the street of New York every day, while WCBS, where Dave Marash was then working, I believe, was fielding eight crews.

When I started Current TV with Al Gore, we unleashed literally millions of VJs with cameras and let them tell their stories—and still we are only at the beginning of this revolution. Yet, having just had meetings with all of the major networks, I can tell you that they would rather go out of business than embrace this concept. And why?

I think it has to do with the idea that "real" reporters don't carry cameras, and that, in fact, if anyone can shoot and edit video, then they are no longer so "special."

I saw this many years ago at Channel 1 in London, when Nick Pollard, who later went on to run Sky, replaced the small mobile video cameras with Betacam and all the accompanying gear. His reason: "I will not have my people laughed at in the streets." It didn't look "professional" to him.

Twenty years later and nothing has changed.

Michael Rosenblum
New York, NY

Open the Door!

Thank you, Curtis Brainard, for an excellent article ("Transparency Watch: A Closed Door," CJR, September/October). The government's press policies establish one-way information flows (them to us) and deter media efforts to get off its storyline. That's only possible when government scientists are not afraid to publicly speak their minds on controversial matters of public interest—the last thing their bosses want to let happen.

The situation has been worsening since the Clinton administration (mostly with the FDA), and it's heading in an Orwellian direction, which means



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unhealthy use of media-control techniques pioneered in totalitarian regimes (think Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union). So long as these government filters and barriers are introduced gradually and informally, rising generations of new journalists will not know better, and their acceptance will be inevitable.

Jim Dickinson
Editor, FDA Webview
Mechanicsburg, PA

I found Curtis Brainard's article very useful. I, too, am disappointed that so many people believe "transparency" has been reduced under the Obama administration. But suggesting that formalized database-access programs and use of social media are somehow being used to cover for increased clampdown on access seems a bit farfetched.

Anytime you involve press officers in trying to manage access to sensitive

information—and much of the information still being researched is sensitive and has significant public-health, industry, and environmental costs associated with it—you'll generate a belief that somehow it is possible to control access to information. What is happening, though, is that younger researchers are using social media to discuss research information more openly and in ways that end-run traditional peer review or agency policy controls.

Just as it's unrealistic to attempt to control all agency scientists' communication with the press, it's unrealistic for agencies to believe that research findings can be completely bottled up until some final publication is reviewed and approved. That's just not how science works. If we overdramatize the back-and-forth jousting of agencies and journalists, we may ignore how much communication may already be taking place on a day-to-day basis.

So, yes, I believe that a journalist (or any citizen) should be able to pick up the phone and call anyone on the government payroll and expect a civil response about what the scientist is working on without Big Brother peering over his or her shoulder. At the same time, the scientist shouldn't be pushed to release unverified, incomplete, or preliminary information that is still undergoing analysis or scientific review. I don't call that censorship. I call that being conservative about methodology and reporting—especially if you know the political and industrial sharks are circling.

Dennis D. McDonald (www.ddmcd.com)
Alexandria, VA

CHAIRMAN'S NOTE

AS I WRITE THIS, EVERY DAY SEEMS TO YIELD A NEW STORY ABOUT SOMETHING called Occupy Wall Street. I have no idea how long Wall Street will be occupied, but it occurs to me that this fiftieth-anniversary issue of the *Columbia Journalism Review* celebrates something we might call Occupy Journalism. Like Occupy Wall Street, CJR is in the protest business. It is not protest in the sense of Occupy Wall Street, which seems to have targeted big banks and other financial institutions (although media concentration and protecting the line that keeps big money from intruding on editorial prerogatives have long been on CJR's agenda). For fifty years, though, CJR has deployed media criticism to protest against shoddy journalism.

But enough with Darts. As everyone knows, journalism and, particularly, journalistic institutions, are in crisis. The old business model is broken, and digital journalism has to figure out how to keep up with itself without sacrificing ethical and professional standards. Which is where CJR comes in. On this momentous occasion (I think, pound for pound, this is the weightiest journal in CJR's history), it's time to distribute some Laurels: to Mike Hoyt, under whose leadership these past ten years CJR has so eloquently fought to define and uphold the highest standards in the profession; to the amazing staff that he has recruited, who have assembled and processed the issue you hold in your hands, not to mention many previous issues and CJR's daily fare online; to Columbia's president, Lee Bollinger, and our dean, Nicholas Lemann, who understand CJR's mission and have helped us fulfill it; to Christie Hefner, who is heading up CJR's fiftieth-anniversary celebrations (check CJR.org for announcements of upcoming events in partnership with The Paley Center for Media in New York and the Newseum in Washington, DC), and opened the doors to sponsors and so many of the advertisers in this issue; and to the advertisers themselves, who have shown their support for an institution which on more than one occasion has been critical of most of them; and to Neil Barsky, chairman of CJR's new Board of Overseers, and the rest of the board members, who have taken it upon themselves to protect and advance the cause of CJR, which we prefer to think of as the cause of truth-telling and journalism itself.

Last but not least, as our readers know, last year cancer took away our new publisher, Cathryn Cronin Cranston, who came to us from the *Harvard Business Review* and the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, among other places. But her vision for CJR's future lives. When asked, "What is CJR's competition?" she replied, "CJR's biggest competition is time. How can we make the magazine and website so compelling that they are must-read destinations? As far as other sources go that comment on the media—I think many, many more voices are useful, particularly in these revolutionary times. However, when the dust settles, it will be the trusted brands which maintain their excellence and reader focus that will come out intact."

Not that we don't have a way to go, but Happy Anniversary to us.

—Victor Navasky

Curtis Brainard's article about transparency in the Obama administration may leave readers with the impression that the Association of Health Care Journalists is getting nowhere in our struggle to open the doors at the Department of Health and Human Services.

On the contrary, we are encouraged by the response from Richard Sorian, who has been HHS assistant secretary for public affairs for the past year. It was Sorian who suggested the quarterly conversations with AHCJ leaders. At each one, he asks for details of our members' experiences—positive and negative—with the media staff at the various HHS agencies.

Sorian also volunteered to travel anywhere in the country to meet with local AHCJ chapters. Such efforts indicate that our complaints are being heard.

It's true that I'm unsure whether anything has changed for reporters seeking information from the many HHS divisions. But that's because change takes time and, in this case, is very hard to measure. It's not because I have no hope.

Felice J. Freyer

*Chair, Right to Know Committee
Association of Health Care Journalists
Columbia, MO*

Where Are the Female Pundits?

I read with interest Paul Starobin's story, "All the President's Pundits" (CJR, September/October), but was struck by the fact that not a single woman was quoted. The only woman mentioned in the piece was Kathleen Parker, who was asked to join President Obama on Air Force One. While most of us aren't able to travel in such company, there are many talented women writing about politics, in Washington and around the country. Are they not considered part of the nation's punditry?

*Jane Eisner
Editor, The Forward
New York, NY*

Going Mobile

Thank you, Chitrangada Choudhury, for writing about this emerging form of journalism ("Urgent Call," CJR, September/October). I am involved with a community media organization called Gram Vaani, based in the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, which in Jharkhand in July launched a news-over-mobile-phone project similar to Swara, the project Choudhury writes about.

Systems like Swara and the Jharkhand mobile news service represent a new paradigm in journalism, which is low-cost and citizen-centric, and has the potential to expand media access to the disenfranchised in India's rural areas. In the first forty days since our launch in Jharkhand, we logged sixty thousand phone calls, and the number of unique callers exceeded six thousand. These numbers indicate the need for systems like these that provide citizens a platform to voice their concerns.

Many mainstream journalists are

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taking an interest in these systems because of the urgent stories they release from conflict-hit zones. Unfortunately, many journalists who use these systems to get their leads to big stories hardly acknowledge their original source.

Sadly, while journalists are willing to use these systems to get their stories, no mainstream media organization is willing to help such initiatives sustain

themselves. Unless and until business models are developed to sustain these systems, such initiatives will not survive in the long run. Once donor funds run out, the project will get pushed to the side. Sustaining such projects requires a paradigm shift in the way news organizations are structured and operate.

Vidya Venkat
London, UK

EDITOR'S NOTE

THIS IS A HANDSOME ISSUE, NO? TWO ENTITIES ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT. The first is Point Five Design, our art consultant, comprised of Alissa Levin, Ben Levine, and Nathan Eames. Their classy and intelligent sensibility has graced our magazine and website since 2007. Point Five helps us turn ideas into images when illustrations are needed, and they always seem to find the right artist. They usually work within the confines of a miserly art budget, and it was nice to shake loose a few more dollars this time around to let them strut more stuff. Thanks to them.

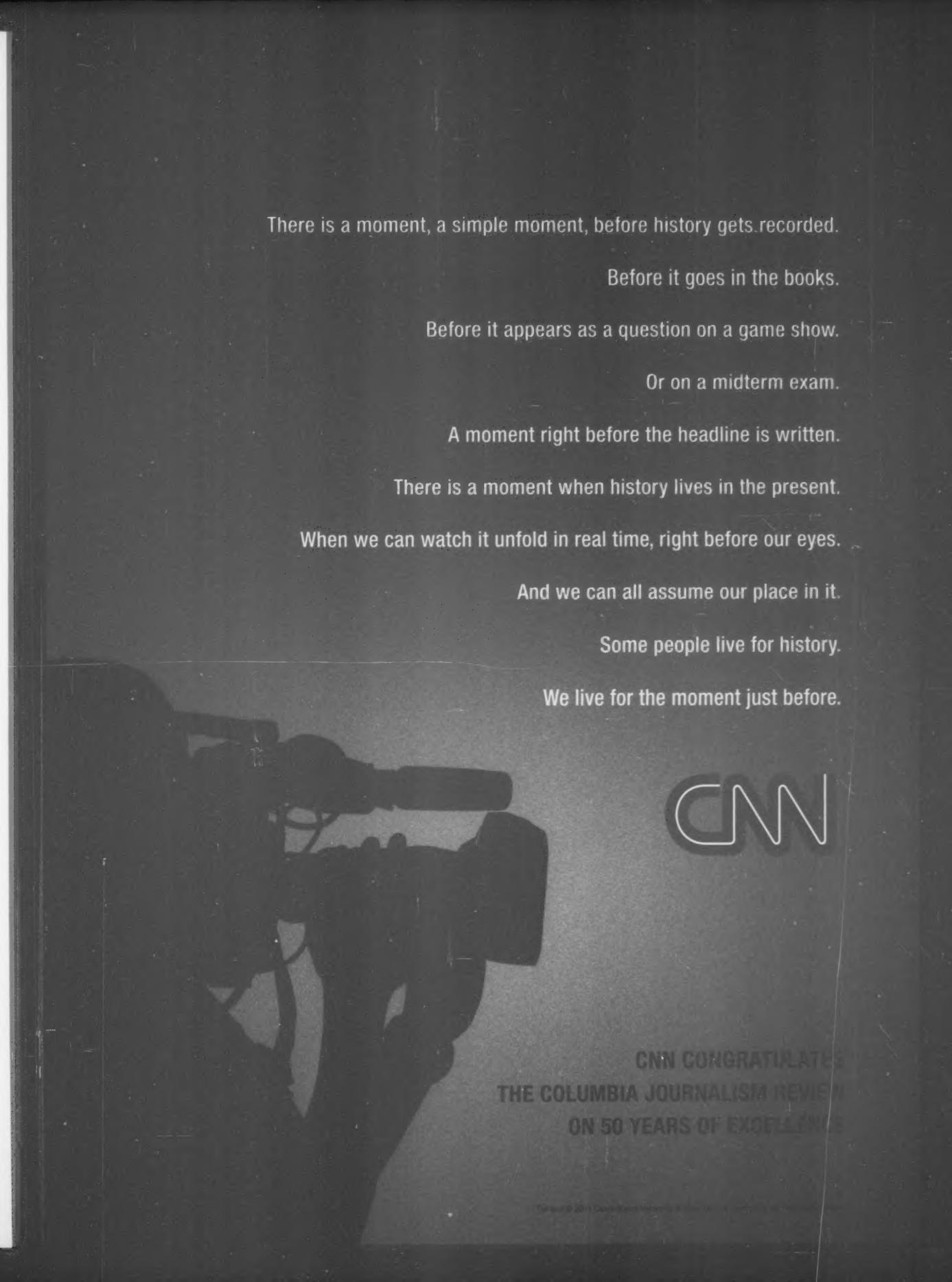
The other entity is Tom O'Neill. His title is associate editor/copy manager, which comes nowhere near describing his role. Tom lays out a majority of the pages in the issue, finds most of the photos, edits some stories and copy edits others. More than that, every word and every image in the magazine, every semicolon and dash, goes through his discerning eye, and through his computer as he processes the whole shebang. He's our last word on style. He pays all the writers and artists and supervises all the interns. He makes the magazine map and places every article and every ad. He never loses his cool, even on a 160-page issue like this one, except when the copy machine/printer breaks down. One. More. Time. Thanks to him.

Speaking of advertising, you may notice that this issue has quite a bit. We're extremely grateful, first of all, to all of those advertisers who put their names in our pages, and we hope to see them again. And I bet that Christie Hefner will be asking them to return. Christie is the chairwoman of our fiftieth anniversary, which we intend to stretch through the coming year in various ways, and she has rolled up her sleeves on our behalf and proven that success is achievable. For this special anniversary issue, she and Dennis Giza, our intrepid acting publisher, filled every ad space in the book, with the help of Joe Duax and Louisa Kearney. Thanks to all of them, and to Cathy Harding, our determined and impressive new development director.

One person I'd like to thank had nothing to do with this print issue, but everything to do with our website, where more readers will see and read the articles in the issue than will do so on paper. That is Michael Murphy, our website developer, along with his team of mysterious people in multiple time zones, including Dean Pajevic.

Something they are working on as I write is a very big deal for us: by the time you read this, I hope, our website will be on a meter model. All this lovely print content—and any print content from over the past three years, and a few editor picks beyond that—will be available online to anyone, free, up to twenty-two articles over six months. Beyond that number, we'll be asking readers who want more to get a web-only subscription or a print subscription, which will include web access. We are working with Steve Brill's Press+ on the meter, and if it works we'll soon be thanking him, too. I believe the meter will do everything we want it to—draw more subscriptions, more visitors to our website, and, eventually, more revenue, which we will convert into a better CJR.

—Mike Hoyt



There is a moment, a simple moment, before history gets recorded.

Before it goes in the books.

Before it appears as a question on a game show.

Or on a midterm exam.

A moment right before the headline is written.

There is a moment when history lives in the present.

When we can watch it unfold in real time, right before our eyes.

And we can all assume our place in it.

Some people live for history.

We live for the moment just before.

CNN

CNN CONGRATULATES
THE COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW
ON 50 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

Hard Numbers

BY ALYSIA SANTO

Typewriter sales and service shops in the Manhattan phone book

	1961	1986	2011
Typewriter sales and service shops in the Manhattan phone book	341	320	25

Computer sales and service shops in the Manhattan phone book

	1961	1986	2011
Computer sales and service shops in the Manhattan phone book	0	74	300+

Minority group employees (black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American) in newspaper newsrooms

	1968	1986	2011
Minority group employees (black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American) in newspaper newsrooms	400	3,400	5,324

Percentage of women on the mastheads of the five largest-circulation US dailies

	1961	1986	2011
Percentage of women on the mastheads of the five largest-circulation US dailies	0	15	23

Number of daily papers in the US

	1961	1985	2009
Number of daily papers in the US	1,761	1,676	1,387

Number of unattributed quotes in a single issue of *The Washington Post*

	July 26, 1961	July 30, 1986	July 27, 2011
Number of unattributed quotes in a single issue of <i>The Washington Post</i>	36	106	11

Number of households with cable in thousands	1961 725	1985 38,170	2009 62,874
Students enrolled in undergraduate journalism programs in thousands	1960 10	1985 83	2009 205
Average salary of an anchorperson in a top-25 market in thousands (2011 dollars)	1961 \$84	1986 \$240	2011 \$118
Number of Arpanet/Internet-connected computers	1969 2	1986 3,500	2011 660 million+
Rate at which Arpanet/Internet traffic doubled in months	1970–1982 21	1983–1997 9	1997–2006 6
Approximate cost per megabyte of computer memory (2010 dollars)	1960 \$38.6 million	1986 \$378	2010 \$0.014

Sources: ASNE, Audit Bureau of Circulations, *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook*, SNL Kagan, *The Washington Post*, Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communications Enrollments, RTNDA, Hofstra University Annual Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Computer History Museum, *Data Processing Technology and Economics*, JDR Computer Products, Newegg.com

Homegrown

TO LOOK BACK AT THE EARLY YEARS OF the *Columbia Journalism Review* is to look at how we used not just words, but the concepts around them as well. Language, of course, evolves, often as a mirror of social changes. And while we would expect to use different words—and words differently—today than we did fifty years ago, it's also a bit surprising to see how little has changed.

Slang and idiom, as expected, are the biggest differences. CJR was not an early adopter of casual language, but “tell it like it is,” a phrase that became popular in the civil rights movement, appears on occasion in the early years. But if you now describe a boring person as “a drip,” as an article did in 1961, you might as well put on a pill-box hat.

Technology also drives our use of language, and our abandonment of same. The word “movieola,” which appeared in a 1968 article, was a corruption of Moviola, a film-editing machine; those words no longer appear in most abridged dictionaries. CJR started out referring to computers as “CPUS,” with their “tubes” called “CRTs,” then “VDTs.” Shorter than “monitors” or “screens,” but whatever.

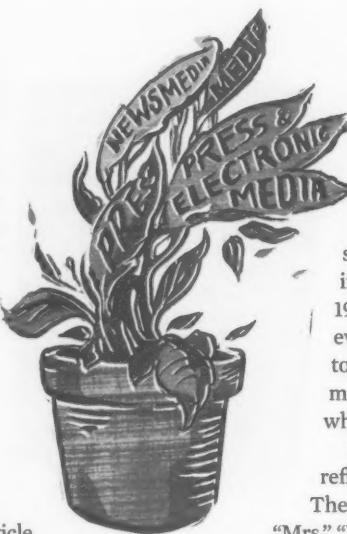
“The press” of the first few issues became “the press and electronic media” (meaning broadcast) in the late sixties, then “news media,” then just plain “media.” Though occasionally used today, “the press” belongs to the same realm as “hell boxes,” where lead type was melted for reuse.

CJR often used the word “stodgy,” though never self-referentially! A 1962 article discussing the (mostly) minuses of the new third edition of *Webster’s International Dictionary* was followed in the next issue by CJR’s ruling that it was siding with the people who believed that the “new” dictionary “was aiding the dissolution of the English language.”

But most early CJR articles were written as if Edward R. Murrow were speaking to academics, not surprising given that CJR was started by a graduate school of journalism. Contractions were few; the *Review* spoke of itself in the third person—the day was ruled by passive voice. Imagine beginning an article today the way this one, from the pilot issue, opened: “As to a publisher’s proprietary projects, like electing a candidate or passing a few bills, the influence of today’s press is open to question. But not the battering impact of newspapers upon themselves, the ravages of self-examination and doubt.”

Yes, that was a lament over “interpretive” journalism, what today we call “spin” or “voice” or “reporting.”

Social change affects usage, and words that are not “politically correct” today sound not just archaic, but offensive.



The 1959 edition of *A Manual of Style* (as *The Chicago Manual of Style* was called then) preferred “Negro,” a step away from “colored”; though it permitted “redskins,” “little brown men,” and “bushmen” as racial “epithets,” CJR mostly shied from those. “Negro” and “black” intermingled in the late sixties, and a Fall 1968 article on how to cover “racial news” even asked: “What is the appropriate word today—‘Negro’ or ‘black’?” Soon after, CJR mostly used “black,” until the late eighties, when “African-American” started creeping in.

The early CJR, like the newspaper world it reflected, was very much a white man’s world. The few women mentioned were “Miss” or

“Mrs.” “Newsmen” and “men” were the pronouns, even when women were involved, well into the women’s rights movement of the seventies. That led to this ludicrous-sounding passage from a Winter 1968–69 article about “The Pill”: “Safety is not absolute but relative, varying with the individual, the severity of *his* condition, *his* age, the available alternatives.” (Emphasis added.)

In the Summer 1968 issue, CJR derided *Newsweek* for a passage that it said mixed fact and opinion because it “poked fun” at a female Marine’s discovery that she didn’t want to kill. It made no mention of the passage’s description of the Marine as “blond, shapely,” since that, of course, was not a matter of “opinion.” CJR added “Ms.” in the late seventies, years after *Ms.* magazine’s founding in 1972. (To its credit, CJR adopted “Ms.” years before *The New York Times*, which held out until mid-1986.)

While little of the above may be surprising, CJR also talked about issues before words for them were widely available.

In 1971, CJR wrote of the promises of cable television: “One can bring to every home two-way, broad-band communications that can provide a whole galaxy of new services,” including “facsimile reproductions” of newspapers and magazines, and “access to information banks at libraries, medical centers, etc.” (Emphasis added.) Remember, this was before the Internet as it exists now was even a gleam in Al Gore’s eye. What we might call “content” today was still “information.”

Finally, a magazine review in the early sixties seems almost prescient: “It is a curious coincidence that two of the newer magazines of serious intent are both devoted to being mere filters of information, rather than originators of it,” the article said. It gave one possible reason: “That *Atlas* and *Current* are responses to the pressing need for collection and organization of information, which the individual reader can no longer do sufficiently for himself.” Can you say “Romenesko”? CJR

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**ON 50 YEARS OF PROVIDING TOUGH LOVE
TO THE JOURNALISM PROFESSION.**

Stephen B. Shepard
Founding Dean
CUNY Graduate School of Journalism
The City University of New York

**CU
NY**

DART



An accounting of fifty years' worth of Darts is hardly a balm for an industry careening through a wrenching

transition. It is a concentrated dose of every journalistic sin imaginable, and some that defy imagination: plagiarism, laziness, racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, hypocrisy, photo manipulation, staged news, stupidity, bad taste, collaborating with law enforcement, junkets, caving to advertisers, paying to play, protecting sacred cows, cowardice, lying, cheating, exacting revenge, miserliness, endangering sources, fabrication, perpetrating hoaxes—a rather sorry record.

It also is a distorted record. There are five decades of Laurels, too, celebrating journalism's more noble inclinations. But Darts & Laurels did not become iconic for its gentle caress; and awareness, as they say in recovery literature, is the first step toward improvement. Here then is a sampling of lowlights, as chronicled in this column since 1961.

Lest anyone think D&L has aimed too many of its 1,370 (and counting) Darts at the weak and the small, a dishonor roll of some marquee recipients: Walter Cronkite (twice, for dubious shilling), President Nixon (for failing to reappoint Kenneth A. Cox to the FCC), Spiro Agnew, Jack Anderson (twice), Don Hewitt, Katie Couric, Tim Russert, Otis Chandler, Chet Huntley, David Brinkley, Ann Landers, Mike Royko, Herb Caen, Maureen Dowd, Morley Safer, Aaron Brown, Al Neuharth, Rex Reed, Steven Brill, Mike Wallace, Linda Ellerbee, and George Will (twice, including one for helping George W. Bush prep for an interview Will was conducting). Most major news outlets—from *The New York Times* to *60 Minutes*—were hit numerous times.

The most common Darts—a combined 36 percent—were for some type of self-dealing: conflicts of interest or crossing the line between business and editorial. Typical was the San Francisco TV reporter who for years heaped glowing coverage on city supervisor Gavin Newsom, who at the time was laying the groundwork for what would be a successful bid for mayor, without letting viewers know that he was a partner in a company headed by Newsom. Less typical was *Fortune's* decision in 1976 to publish a ten-page piece, "The Philippines: A New Role In Southeast Asia," without disclosing that the Marcos government had paid the magazine \$183,000 to print the article, unlabeled as an advertisement.

There also were numerous instances of outlets failing to report honestly on themselves when the information was embarrassing or unflattering. For instance, when *The New York Times*, in coverage of the 1981 Scarsdale Diet Doctor murder trial, edited out references to its managing editor's wife (Audrey Topping) and its publisher's mother

(Iphigene Sulzberger) when quoting from a letter, written by the accused, that was entered as evidence.

If the foregoing Darts were routine, others were simply outrageous. Like the 1976 editorial in the *Philadelphia Daily News* that urged the execution of a convicted murderer—"It's about time for Leonard Edwards to take the Hot Squat"—and concluded with the directive to "Fry him." Or this headline on a 2002 story in the Trenton, New Jersey, *Trentonian* about a fire at a psychiatric hospital: ROASTED NUTS.

More than one Dart went to coverage that diminished the crime of rape, including one to legendary *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Mike Royko for referring in a 1979 column to an attempted gang rape of a seventeen-year-old girl as a "frolic" in the woods. Then there was the editor in Illinois who in 1966 used the word "coons" in a headline to mean African Americans because, he said later, it fit the space.

There were the creative managers at the Ft. Lauderdale *Sun-Sentinel* who, in 1993, assigned two reporters who had been diagnosed with repetitive-stress injuries to security-guard duty at the paper's printing plant; and the humorless *USA Today* bosses who fired without severance three newsroom employees in 2002 after they scratched "Kilroy was here" in the layer of dust on a sculpture in the executive suite of the company's new headquarters; and the geniuses at KMJ, a radio station in Fresno, California, home to Rush Limbaugh's morning show, who canned their weatherman in 1995 after he refused to improve his rainy forecast for the day of the annual KMJ-sponsored picnic in honor of the conservative commentator (cosmic justice was rendered, however, when it poured on Rush's barbecue); and the hapless folks at *The Detroit News*, who in 1976 rushed to print with a story of "a one in a million biological occurrence": Siamese twin toads, found in the backyard of a local resident, which turned out to be just two ordinary toads "hell-bent on making more toads."

Finally, what is arguably the strangest Dart bestowed to date: in 2001, the Logan, Utah, *Herald Journal* published an editorial headlined, YOU JUST NEVER KNOW, in which the editors revealed "a situation that we think needs to see the light of day, even if only partially." It involved "a well-paid public employee" who regularly visits "a reclusive woman in a central Logan apartment," from "beyond the walls" of which "can be heard hours of loud slapping sounds and blood-curdling screams" that can only be interpreted "as some warped, sadomasochistic ritual." The journalistic rationale? Not gossip or prurient interest, the editors assured their readers, but rather: "At least now you know our community is not immune to such things, and that they don't always involve people you would immediately suspect of such behavior."

Here's hoping journalism won't top that one in the next fifty years. CJR

SEEING IT CLEARLY TELLING IT WELL

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ENSURING THAT THE RIGHT STORIES GET TOLD



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Through the Years

Five decades of journalism, from the pages of CJR

BY CLINT HENDLER

What Went Uncovered

When New York City's newspapers resumed publishing after a nearly four-month strike, CJR's Spring '63 issue explored the wide effects of the news gap: A key city hall official only learned of two Black Muslims' arrest on disorderly conduct charges when 400 brethren showed up to protest outside his office. Noting slumlords whose crimes escaped coverage, the city's building commissioner remarked, "There's a distinct difference between a \$500 fine and a \$500 fine plus a story in the *Times*." And the citizens' group against razing Pennsylvania Station, a Beaux-Arts landmark, complained not only of trouble rousing public sympathy, but that without the benefit of advance coverage, they'd literally missed a chance to speak against the demolition before a final vote.

Walter Lippmann writes three columns based on more than four hours of interviews with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev

John F. Kennedy becomes the first president to regularly conduct live broadcast press conferences



'61

The *New Yorker* publishes "Silent Spring," a groundbreaking three-part investigation of pesticides by Rachel Carson

Communication satellite **Telstar 1** goes into orbit and relays first television images



'62

ABC airs *Crisis*, a vérité look at JFK's showdown with George Wallace over integrating the University of Alabama

Almost 20,000 New York City newsworkers end a 114-day strike

'63

David Halberstam (New York Times) and Malcolm Browne (AP) win Pulitzers for coverage of the overthrow of South Vietnam's Diem regime

Supreme Court's *Times v. Sullivan* ruling gives legal protection from libel when reporting on public figures

'64

Ralph Nader publishes muckraking auto-safety book *Unsafe at Any Speed*

The holdout *Boston Herald-Traveller* stops running display ads on page one



'65



The *Los Angeles Times* has moved into the **Age of the Computer**. An RCA 301 now accepts paper tape punched by electric typewriters and in 17 seconds produces enough corrected and spaced tape to give automatic typesetting machines enough to fill a newspaper column. Copy editors' changes, too, are fed into the computer and incorporated. The tremendous speed of the operation is obviously a breakthrough. Who cannot help wondering, though, about the feelings of reporters plugged in on the system? They must feel a little as cows did when the milking machine was introduced.

—from "Plugged In,"
Winter '63





A voice boomed from the radio: **The President of the United States is dead.** I believed it instantly. It sounded true. I knew it was true. I stood still a moment, then began running. Hugh Sidey of *Time*, a close friend of the president, was walking slowly ahead of me. "Hugh," I said, "the president's dead." Sidey stopped, looked at me, looked at the ground. I couldn't talk about it. I couldn't think about it. I couldn't do anything but run on to the press room. Then I told the others.

—from New York Times correspondent Tom Wicker's recollections of Parkland Hospital on November 22, 1963, Winter '64

Demonstration Lab

Journalists have always struggled to count political crowds; their estimates are inevitably greeted by partisan calls for a higher or lower figure. In CJR's Spring '67 issue, Herbert A. Jacobs field tested a method based on crowd density and square footage. He had two advantages: as a lecturer at UC Berkeley's journalism school, he described the campus as "activist, speech-prone, and rally-prone," and Sproul Plaza, the locus of the Free Speech Movement, was helpfully divided into regularly-sized squares.



Esquire publishes Gay Talese's "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold," a New Journalism classic

Freedom of Information Act signed, somewhat grudgingly, by President Lyndon Johnson

New York Times prints Harrison Salisbury's reporting from North Vietnam, drawing charges of treason

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting is established

Missing a Massacre

Seymour Hersh was surprised by a representative officer's reaction when he asked about the My Lai massacre: "I'll never cease to be amazed that it hasn't been written about before." In an article adapted for CJR's Winter '69-'70 issue, Hersh wrote that "the notion that those men thought that the press had somehow fallen on the job is, well, significant." In early September 1969, the AP briefly reported that Lieutenant William Calley would be charged with the murders "of an unspecified number" of Vietnamese civilians. It brought no follow-up. Hersh got on the story after a late-October tip; rejected by both *Life* and *Look*, Hersh published with the left-leaning Dispatch News Agency.

Note to too many Southern copydesks:

Why not drop the loaded word "mixing" as a synonym for integration?

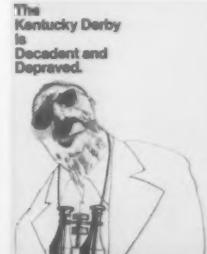
—from Darts & Laurels, Summer '64

Scanlan's Monthly publishes Hunter S. Thompson's "The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved," the first work described as Gonzo journalism

Christian Science Monitor's Robert Cahn, reporting on national parks, wins the first Pulitzer for work on an ecological issue

The Saturday Evening Post, once America's most popular weekly magazine, suspends publication

Newsweek's female employees complain they are "forced to assume a subsidiary role," and file a landmark discrimination suit



'66

'67



'68

'69

'70

A Pleistocene Pamphlet

The May/June '71 CJR had a critique by eight female student journalists of a pamphlet from the Associated Press Managing Editors dripping with sexism (example: a woman's sensitivities mandate "one-fourth of the criticism" given to male reporters). That fall, CJR ran the APME's official response, contending the students' feminism was "a hobbyhorse teetering to destination nowhere":

A woman's womanness shows up consistently.... In the newsroom she does extremely well on bread-and-butter news stories and often is unexcelled on features delineating people's doings. If you assign her to unravel a complicated financial story she is apt to fall apart.... Women become excellent copy editors. They are patient, careful, cheerful, and the repetitive nature of the work does not seem to bother them.



Cable TV could change the way Americans live.

By installing a strip of copper wire within an sheath only slightly

larger than a lipstick tube, one can bring to every home two-way, broad-band communications that can provide a whole galaxy of news services. These could encompass facsimile reproductions of documents, including possibly newspapers, magazines, and specialized information services...

-from Stuart F. Sucherman's
"Cable TV: The Endangered Revolution,"
May/June '71

Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward produce first joint Washington Post story on Watergate burglary

Branzburg v. Hayes hints at a constitutional basis for a journalist's testimonial privilege



CBS airs "The Selling of the Pentagon," an exposé of the military's taxpayer-funded public relations apparatus

The Supreme Court's Pentagon Papers decision forbids prior restraint on publication without evidence of "grave and irreparable" damage to national security

Scribes Unite! (And Criticize.)

Newsrooms were not immune to the upheavals of the late sixties and seventies, as reporters agitated for greater power within their news organizations, and for aggressive and more inclusive journalism. One result: more than a dozen short-lived regional journalism reviews, which gave journalists, at some career risk, a platform to pique their employers. In special sections in 1971, '72, and '73, CJR published the best of their work. The movement that inspired the publications proved to be as ephemeral as the outlets; a writer in CJR's November/December '76 issue noted that, by then, "the reporter power 'movement' seemed little more than a memory."

Sidney Schanberg
reports for The New
York Times from
Khmer Rouge-
controlled Cambodia

NPR reads 22 hours of
Watergate-related
White House tape
transcripts on air

The Anchorage Daily
News and Anchorage
Times's joint operating
agreement is the
first antitrust exemption
approved under
the Newspaper
Preservation Act

Tom Wolfe publishes
The New Journalism
anthology

Lansing, Michigan's
ACLU chapter begins
a successful drive to
have WJIM's broadcast
license revoked for
blacklisting local
politicians from TV
coverage



'71

'73

'74

'75

Collective Response

On June 2, 1976, Don Bolles was mortally wounded in a Phoenix hotel parking lot when six sticks of dynamite exploded under his Datsun. In response, the Investigative Reporters and Editors professional organization, which Bolles had helped found a year before, sponsored The Arizona Project, a five-month collaborative effort to investigate the murder and organized crime in the state. Executives at the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Times* said they didn't believe in group journalism, and declined to detail reporters. They, along with Bolles's paper, *The Arizona Republic*, also declined to publish the resulting 80,000-word investigation. Melvin Mencher dissented in CJR's November/December '77 issue, claiming the team had exposed a corrupt "way of life long gone in most of the country," and thereby "demonstrated the practicality of the team method," setting the stage for today's blossoming of collaborative reporting.

"My Mini-Watergate"

After CBS News's Daniel Schorr obtained records of a 1971 FBI investigation of him done at White House demand, he wrote about them in CJR's November/December '74 issue, suggesting the episode had presaged the dirty tricks that eventually brought President Nixon down. Conducted under the laughable premise that the frequent Nixon antagonist was up for an executive appointment, the incident was incorporated in the House Judiciary Committee's articles of impeachment. In 1973, Nixon was caught on tape downplaying, but admitting, this abuse of power: "We just ran a name check on the son-of-a-bitch."



Mother Jones reveals that tens of thousands of fire-prone **Ford Pintos** were knowingly sold

Washington Journalism Review, later renamed *American Journalism Review*, launches



Reporting from the 33,000-circulation *Niagara Gazette* boosts early investigations of toxic Love Canal site

Church Committee on Intelligence Activities claims 50 journalists on CIA payroll—subsequent reporting suggests number as high as 400

'76

'77

'78

'79

'80

White Out

In CJR's March/April '79 issue, Pulitzer winner Nick Kotz investigated the "shockingly slow and unacceptably limited" progress in integrating American newsrooms. Two-thirds of the nation's 1,762 dailies still had not hired one non-white journalist; of the paltry 1,700 minority journalists, only 59 held positions of assistant city editor or higher. Kotz suggested that hiring editors wanted recruits with experience on smaller papers, but failed to recognize that such papers might be the most resistant to hiring minorities. The most diverse newspapers owed their success to internal advocacy by minority journalists, who pushed affirmative efforts "to seek out—and when necessary—train promising candidates."



Jann Wenner seems anything but the embodiment of a counter-culture rock publisher. Indeed, in a dark blue suit, neat haircut, and gold wedding band, sipping Ballantine's scotch, he looks like a slightly mod salesman for Merrill

Lynch. Except that in the middle of an interview, he finished off the scotch, opened his leather attaché case, took out a small paper bag, poured some white powder onto his hand, and started sniffing it. "I hope this doesn't start making me yak," he commented rather disarmingly.

—from Peter Janssen's "Rolling Stone's Quest for Respectability," January/February '74

"Jimmy's World," **Janet Cooke**'s Pulitzer-winning profile of a heroin-addicted African-American child, later revealed as a fabrication, is published in *The Washington Post*

The Progressive prints "The H-Bomb Secret" after a six-month court delay on the grounds the article would reveal classified information

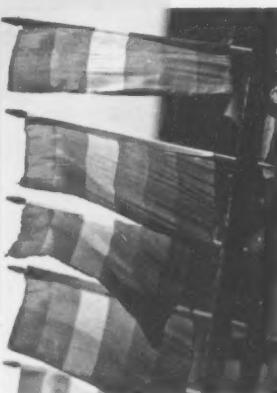
Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network is founded



The Privacy Protection Act prohibits searches of newsrooms or reporters

First Out

On November 20, 1980, the day after a homophobic shooting spree, *New York Post* reporter Joe Nicholson approached an editor and volunteered to write his "reaction as a gay person." It was a pioneering move. Reflecting in the March/April '82 CJR, Nicholson reported that the offer to write that never-published piece had made him the first and still only openly gay daily newspaper reporter in the city. "The *Times* will not print the word gay," Nicholson wrote, and "neither the *Post*"—whose coverage he described as "frequently ... derogatory"—"nor the *Daily News* can be said to be eager to cover gay news." His solution: "I don't think gay news coverage will improve greatly until others come out."



The format of the typical USA Today news story has changed so little since the paper's 1982 debut that most of its editors and writers can recite it in their sleep: the short snappy "we" lead (as in "We spend much more than we save..."), a few paragraphs of elaboration and quotes, and, finally, what are known as "factoids"—the bulleted list of boiled down facts and statistics. At times, the paper's highly stylized formation has apparently had an effect even on people interviewed by USA Today: many of them have shown a suspicious willingness to talk in the first-person plural, and to refer to the United States consistently as "the USA."

—from Tom McNichol and Margaret Carlson's "Al Neuharth's Technicolor Baby, Part II," May/June '85

The Cable Box

In 1980, when CNN debuted, it launched "in a domain with no existing ground rules," noted James Traub in CJR's July/August '81 issue. "The essence of CNN news, however, remains the two-minute morsel...as brief as the typical network segment—and hence, inevitably as superficial." Traub concluded that "Ted Turner and his boys" had demonstrated their professionalism and dented the networks' dominance, but because they had failed to bring greater innovations "are not yet heroes—only pros."



A New Kind of File

In CJR's November/December '82 issue, Steve Weinberg hailed "a decade of newsroom use" of computer-assisted reporting. One recent example: *The Miami Herald*, *The St. Petersburg Times*, and the *Orlando Sentinel* pooled \$75,000 to rent time on a university computer, keying in their own database of campaign-finance reports. The project led to unprecedented stories on influence seekers and the state's politicians—and allowed one *Herald* reporter to finally stop relying on a wall of sixty card-catalog boxes.

After press restrictions have been lifted, *The New York Times*'s Stuart Taylor details "official misinformation" surrounding the invasion of Grenada

Anchorwoman **Christine Craft** goes to court claiming she was demoted because of her age and appearance



NBC broadcasts "**The Faces of Death in Africa**," a report on Ethiopian famine

The National News Council, founded in 1973 as a private, blue-ribbon adjudicator of press complaints, folds



J. Anthony Lukas publishes *Common Ground*, his chronicle of Boston's busing battle

The AP's chief Mideast correspondent, **Terry Anderson**, is kidnapped in Lebanon and held hostage until 1991



The Atlantic publishes "The Education of David Stockman," by William Greider, revealing Reagan's budget director's disenchantment with administration policy

The Washington Star ceases publication

Philip Zweig's articles in *The American Banker* predict the collapse of Penn Square Bank

CNN's *Crossfire* debuts, bringing high-volume political debate programs to cable

'81

'82

'83

'84

'85

Conventional Wisdom

Garry Wills scrutinized television's lens on the Democrats' 1984 national convention in San Francisco for CJR's September/October '84 issue, and concluded that the event and its coverage, like the election itself, now constituted "more a festive rite than considered debate." Even so, having found noteworthy if superficial dissent on the way to Mondale's nomination, Wills rejoined journalists ready to abandon conventions: "It is quite true that the outcome of a modern national convention is predictable, and looks preordained. Still, the conclusion of sexual congress is also supposed to be fairly standard; but how you get there matters."



Anger Management

Amid the chain consolidations of the eighties, Doug Underwood's March/April '88 CJR article, "When MBAs Rule the Newsroom," captured an uneasy time. Editors "have begun to behave more and more like the managers of any other corporate entity," focusing on marketing, readership surveys, budgeting, and management training. Underwood wrote that many reporters, used to employers that nurtured idiosyncrasies, independence, and irreverence, now felt unwelcome. Journalists complained that stories unappealing to target demographics were being given short shrift, and that personnel concerns were eating up midlevel editors' time at the expense of copy. A seasoned *Seattle Times* reporter said he was denied a promotion after a company psychologist judged him a poor fit for the era, concluding he showed "little interest in paperwork or bureaucratic routine."

Alex Jones dissects Louisville *Courier-Journal* owners' decision to sell in "The Fall of the House of Bingham"

Bill Cox, managing editor of the *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, reveals he has AIDS

The *Miami Herald* cripples Gary Hart's presidential campaign by reporting on his infidelities

The Federal Communications Commission repeals the Fairness Doctrine, saying it is unconstitutional and ineffective

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution publishes "The Color of Money," a series on redlining and a hallmark in data-driven reporting

Supreme Court's *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* decision curtails student journalists' free-speech rights



Since Oliver North's trial, I have talked to more than a dozen of the reporters who have methodically tried to connect the dots to fill in the Iran-contra picture. Their strongest complaints were reserved for their peers—those editors and colleagues who treated the subject of constitutional violations as academic or, worse, trivial, precisely because Congress had not responded with outrage. The press seemed to share, rather than challenge, Congress's willingness to pass the buck.

—from Scott Armstrong's "Iran-Contra: Was the press any match for all the president's men?"
May/June '90

"I hope CJR isn't going to call this journalism."

—columnist Jack Germond, to a CJR reporter before an appearance on *The McLaughlin Group*, May/June '86



PBS airs "Inside Gorbachev's USSR," a series by Hedrick Smith and Martin Smith detailing perestroika

Bloomberg expands its information services to include Bloomberg News, a financial wire service

The New Yorker publishes Janet Malcolm's "The Journalist and the Murderer"

Time Inc. and Warner Communications merge, creating the world's largest media company





Strategic Positioning

Where is the right place to cover a war? After the Gulf War had ended, CJR's May/June '91 issue presented at least four perspectives. Christopher Hanson of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* joined a Pentagon-controlled (and censored) press pool usually far removed from the battle, sarcastically noting that "at least we got to be part of the big adventure." *New York Times* reporter Chris Hedges described quitting the pool system to become a "unilateral," and donning a uniform and a military haircut to blend in among soldiers "who violated orders to allow us to do our job." Another article judged CNN correspondent Peter Arnett's decision to report from Baghdad under the thumb of Saddam Hussein's press minders as a "close call." And Michael Massing argued that the press's front line ought to have been in Washington, where there was digging to be done: "This war needed fewer David Halberstams and more I. F. Stones."

Philadelphia *Inquirer* investigative team Don Barlett and Jim Steele publish "What Went Wrong," their look at America's weakening middle class

Arthur Sulzberger Sr. appoints Arthur Sulzberger Jr. publisher of The New York Times

There Are No Children Here, Alex Kotlowitz's book about a family in a Chicago housing project, is published

In *Masson v. New Yorker*, the Supreme Court finds that quotations that distort the speaker's meaning can be defamatory



Kevin Carter photographs a vulture stalking an emaciated Sudanese girl

Riding the Silicon Valley wave, *Wired* launches and breaks even in its first year

Typing Back

After coming under fire for darkening O.J. Simpson's mugshot for its cover, Time's managing editor took to an AOL chatroom to explain. Writing in CJR's November/December '94 issue, Jennifer Wolff reported that it was the first time a journalist of such stature had gone online to make "himself accountable." So it was in journalism's early Internet days: "Readers have unprecedented access to reporters and editors, and journalists enjoy the rare opportunity to learn with lightning speed what their audience is thinking." Not all were so eager to embrace the scrum.

Asked if his writers would entertain ques-

tions or opinions from online readers, *Vanity Fair* editor Graydon Carter demurred: "That's what cocktail parties are for."



Citizen Journalism 1.0

In the nineties, a movement—known as "public" or "civic" journalism—held that the news industry could no longer, as Mike Hoyt described it in the September/October '95 issue of CJR, "act merely as a mirror of events." The call went out to provide forums for citizens and journalists to cooperate to help shape news agendas and forge consensus on important issues. Doubters worried about relinquishing authority and stepping away from traditions of objectivity, and derided the experiments (according to one 1994 tally, attempted in over 170 newsrooms) as little more than egotistical self-promotion. Enthusiasm and foundation support for public journalism waned by decade's end, just as the Internet exploded the possibilities for citizens to craft their own information and civic landscapes.

Alix Freedman of *The Wall Street Journal* exposes internal tobacco industry memos

This American Life, rejected by National Public Radio, goes on air at Chicago's WBEZ as *Your Radio Playhouse*



The *New Republic* publishes "No Exit," Betsy McCaughey's attack on the Clinton health-care bill

Hispanic, black, Asian, and Native American journalist groups host inaugural Unity Conference

'91

'92

'93

'94

'95

For twenty-four days I tracked **Tonya Harding** for *The Boston Globe* as she moved from an obscure figure skater to a criminal defendant. No piece of information was too trivial. No effort too ridiculous. I endured the embarrassing experience of slipping in alongside a crowd of ten-year-olds at Harding's rink, in the hopes that Harding's coach could speak to me (she wouldn't). I spent one chilly evening sitting in a rented car while a colleague looked in the windows of the cheaply built A-frame where Harding lived (trespassing by anyone's definition). "I see some skates," she said, nose at the glass. When she lifted up the lid on the garbage can, I said, "Will you get in this car!" and reluctantly she did.

—from Jane Meredith Adams's
"My Twenty-Four Days on the Slippery Slope,"
May/June '95



Smoke, but No Fire

When CBS and *60 Minutes* neutered a story on the tobacco industry in fear of a multibillion-dollar lawsuit, it raised questions about the dangers of television networks operating within conglomerates. In CJR's January/February '96 issue, Lawrence Grossman, a former president of NBC News, wrote that while CBS executives had a duty to protect shareholders "from undue risk... owning a company with a news division is one of the risks CBS stockholders take." The network was a corporate sibling to a tobacco company, and a major lawsuit could have interfered with CBS's pending sale to Westinghouse. Those entanglements were not a decisive factor in the story's treatment, Grossman concluded, but their existence "almost demanded that CBS do whatever it reasonably could to put the piece on the air," to avoid the perception that business interests had defanged a report in the public interest.

The San Jose Mercury News publishes "Dark Alliance," Gary Webb's investigation of crack dealing, the contras, and the CIA

Fox News, MSNBC, and Al Jazeera all launch



'96

After 58 years, the San Francisco Chronicle publishes Herb Caen's last column, which joshes the mayor for boarding a bus without exact fare

America's last major newspaper strike ends in Detroit after 583 days



'97

Washington Rumor Mill

In CJR's March/April '98 issue, Washington veteran Jules Witcover took a look at the frenzied first days of reporting on the Lewinsky scandal. "The tabloids were hard pressed to outdo the mainstream," he wrote, cataloging an array of sensational scoops (some false, many eventually proved true) with opaque, second-hand, or suspect sourcing. As "the story spread like an arsonist's fire," a poll found three-quarters of Americans thought the press was giving it too much attention, further tarnishing a news industry that "already struggles under public skepticism, cynicism, and disaffection."



Dan Rather's dramatic, middle-of-the-night announcement of the Bush "win" is now part of election-night legend:

"...a hip-hip hooray and a big Texas howdy to the new president....sip it, savor it, cup it, photostat it, underline it in red, press it in a book, put it in an album, hang it on the wall." Upon recanting that grandiloquence, Rather told viewers:

"If you're disgusted with us, I don't blame you."

—from Neil Hickey's "The Big Mistake,"
January/February '01



All television networks and The Associated Press call Florida, and the 2000 presidential election, for Vice President Al Gore

America Online and Time Warner's merger creating the world's largest media company gets antitrust approval

The Drudge Report reports *Newsweek* has "spiked" a story on President Clinton's affair with a White House intern

Spy magazine folds

'98

The Associated Press reveals that during the Korean War, US soldiers killed perhaps hundreds of civilians at No Gun Ri

Los Angeles Times splits profits from a special section on the city's new Staples Center with the arena's owners



'99



Intelligence Failures

The anecdote was chilling. In early 2003, a cable producer phoned an intelligence reporter to ask what he thought of the case supporting the invasion of Iraq. After the reporter offered a geographic analogy from the Vietnam era, the caller asked if he could please spell it: "T-O-N-K-I-N" On the eve of the war, Ted Gup, writing in CJR's March/April '03 issue, warned that journalists must discuss the perils of intelligence: it is subject to political meddling, rarely conclusive, and has an uneven historical record. Gup pointed out that the main *casus belli*—that Iraq might give weapons of mass destruction to terrorists—had been discounted only months before by CIA Director George Tenet. Gup quoted *Washington Post* veteran Walter Pincus saying any Al Qaeda-Iraq link was "clearly hyped." He closed by suggesting the next generation would need to learn how to spell another place: "B-A-G-H-D-A-D."

Are bloggers journalists? Will they soon replace newspapers? The best answer to those questions is: those are really dumb questions; enough hot air has been expended in their name already. A more productive, tangible line of inquiry is: Is journalism being produced by blogs, is it interesting, and how should journalists react to it? The answers, by my lights, are "yes," "yes," and "in many ways."

—from Matt Welch's "Blogworld and its Gravity," September/October '03

To be a wise and skeptical journalist these days is to be a patriot.

—from Mike Hoyt's "Journalists as Patriots," November/December '01

Michael R. Gordon and Judith Miller's co-authored story in *The New York Times* suggesting Iraq sought aluminum tubes for uranium enrichment bolsters case for war

While on assignment in Pakistan, *Wall Street Journal* reporter **Daniel Pearl's** murder is filmed and released by his killers

The New York Times memorizes the 9/11 victims through "Portraits of Grief"

Supreme Court decision in *Tasini v. New York Times* protects freelance authors' digital copyrights



Prisoners of Convention

In CJR's September/October '06 issue, Eric Umansky praised American journalists for unmasking murder, torture, and abuse of detainees post-9/11. But on close examination he found an "ambiguous picture." Despite the revelations, reporters struggled to trace responsibility up the chain of command. Stories were "buried, played down, or ignored" by doubtful or timid editors. When published, they often drew little follow-up. In the face of arguments that coercive interrogation was necessary, Umansky wrote that it took chutzpah on the part of journalists to suggest that detainee abuse was important and—by giving the mistreatment prominent coverage—"implicitly, wrong." Before March 2004, when photographic evidence from Abu Ghraib changed the climate, Umansky concluded, "chutzpah was in particularly short supply."

Seymour Hersh's reporting in *The New York Times* examines how intelligence went wrong in the run-up to Iraq

Junior *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair is revealed as serial fabulist and plagiarist, bringing down the paper's two top editors



The New York Times prints Eric Lichtblau and James Risen's warrantless wiretapping scoop

The Huffington Post launches as a mostly celebrity-written liberal opinion forum



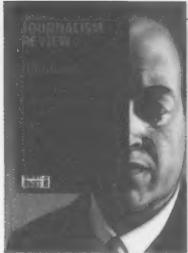
'01

'02

'03

'04

'05



A Subprime Record

"These are grim times for the nation's financial media," began Dean Starkman's May/June '09 analysis of more than 700 significant articles preceding 2008's financial crisis. While many journalists claimed their loud pre-crash alarms had been ignored, Starkman argued that line of defense unwittingly made a case for the business press's own "irrelevance—all that newsprint and coated paper, those millions of words, the bar graphs, stipple portraits" would have been for naught. When Starkman dissected the record, alongside many glossy corporate profiles he found some strong work; but what the public needed were "warnings that the Wall Street-backed lending industry was running amok. It didn't get them."

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"The really **horrible security situation** in Iraq has made it not just terribly dangerous to report there but terribly, terribly expensive. The danger has chased a lot of reporters away. In '03 and '04 there were hundreds. And you never really saw them much until some muckety-muck would come to the Green Zone for a press conference, and everybody would crowd in and there were four or five hundred reporters. Now maybe there's like fifty. There's nothing—there's nobody there."

—from New York Times reporter Dexter Filkins's quote in "Reporting Iraq, 2003-2006: An Oral History," November/December '06

The Boston Globe's Charlie Savage explores George Bush's use of presidential **signing statements**

McClatchy buys Knight Ridder, promptly selling just-acquired papers in Philadelphia, San Jose, and St. Paul



Talking Points Memo connects the dots of the US Attorney firings

Politico launches after its founding editors decline an offer to build a similar site for The Washington Post

'07

This American Life and NPR explain the origins of the financial crisis in "The Giant Pool of Money"

New York Times reporter David Rohde is kidnapped in Afghanistan; more than 40 news organizations will keep his captivity secret

'08

Least-Warranted Correction:

"News Corp.'s Fox News was incorrectly described in a page-one article yesterday as being sympathetic to the Bush cause."

—Wall Street Journal, October 26

—from "Media 2004: Some not-so-high points," a list appearing in CJR's January/February '05 issue

From the Bottom Up

In CJR's March/April 2009 issue, Amanda Michel explained the "pro-am model" behind The Huffington Post's campaign 2008 OffTheBus project. She led a small team of professional editors who wrangled writing, editing, reporting, and fact-checking from at least 8,000 amateurs. Among many other stories, the project used volunteers with accounting skills to estimate how much money Bill Clinton brought into his wife's campaign, and how much Obama's made from branded merchandise. One participant sparked controversy when, at a closed-door fundraiser, she recorded Obama saying he understood why voters might "cling to religion or guns." Since pro-am relies on interested volunteers, Michel reasoned, it would require some rethinking of the role of objectivity in newsgathering but it could reconnect diminished newsrooms to their audiences while powering "critical collaborative-reporting projects."



CJR's running total of journalists laid off or bought out since January 2007 was 11,240 by mid-February, and we surely missed some. Our fear is that America won't realize what it has lost until the press is a ninety-pound weakling—online, on paper, whatever.

We see some faint reasons for hope. There is great and healthy innovation and ferment, both outside and inside the mainstream media, as journalists and engaged citizens collectively search for **an economic support system for reporting**. Connecting appetites and innovation to income will not be easy, but we don't really have a choice.

—from "Reasons to Believe," editorial, March/April '09

ProPublica's Sheri Fink reconstructs the deadly choices made at a Hurricane Katrina-battered hospital, becoming the first journalist from an online outlet to win a Pulitzer

Detroit becomes the first major American city without daily home newspaper delivery

'09

WikiLeaks releases "Collateral Murder," a leaked video showing the deaths of two Reuters employees

Newsweek reportedly sells for one dollar, and merges with The Daily Beast website CJR



Pulitzer's Magazine?

Our founding editor considers our roots

Here is the best and here is the worst story of the day....Here is the wrong of the day; here is the injustice that needs to be righted; here is the best editorial; here is a brilliant paragraph; here is a bit of sentimental trash; here is a superb 'beat'; here is a scandalous 'fake,' for which the perpetrator ought to go to Sing Sing; here is a grossly inaccurate and misleading headline; here is an example of crass ignorance of foreign politics; here is something 'crammed' from an almanac by a man who does not know the meaning of figures when he sees them. —Joseph Pulitzer, on how to evaluate newspapers, in "The College of Journalism," *The North American Review*, May 1904.

IN 1960, THE FACULTY OF COLUMBIA'S GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM FOUND itself talking about putting out a magazine. Many of its members, perhaps all, were hesitant—not just because it was to be a magazine but because it was to be a magazine devoted to criticizing journalism. By and large, journalism schools and journalism professors did not criticize journalism. Indeed, Columbia's longtime dean, Carl W. Ackerman, had devoted himself to just the opposite—defending the press, even, for example, joining the American Newspaper Publishers Association in opposing legislation to get newspapers to pay a minimum wage.

A new dean, Edward W. Barrett, had taken charge in 1956. A former State Department official and *Newsweek* editor, he was also, of all things, a dropout from the journalism school's class of 1933. He soon woke up the school from a long period of stasis, adding new programs, hiring new professors as the budget allowed, and seeing to it that the school got a lot of favorable publicity. He also began to use his speaking dates and periodic reports to assess and even disparage American journalism for shallowness, triviality, and stodginess.

At the time, I was doing odd jobs as Barrett's assistant, and I noted the healthy reaction to his sallies: considerable praise, a little grumbling. I realized that there was a modicum of press criticism already available, but scattered and sporadic. We could feast on "The Wayward Press" of A. J. Liebling in *The New Yorker*, of course, and could listen to the critiques on CBS outlets started by the tragically short-lived Don Hollenbeck. There also was *Nieman Reports*, from the mid-career program at Harvard, and a new media section in the *Saturday Review*. But there was no nexus, a continuing intake for a flow of criticism from varied sources. I sent the dean a memo proposing something called the "Columbia University Journalism Review."

The proposal might well have died on the desk of a more cautious dean, but Ed Barrett was adventurous, and saw a glimmer of a way to perform a service for

American journalism (whether American journalism liked it or not) and at the same time to add a new dimension to the school of journalism. We soon had the faculty—in those days, a mere handful—chewing on the possibilities and dangers. In summing up, the secretary, Richard T. Baker, proposed a somewhat kind, gentle publication, a friendly voice that might seduce the press into virtue. Maybe not exactly what the dean and I had in mind, but there was consensus enough at least to permit us (even underexperienced as I was, I was designated acting managing editor) to start assembling a trial issue and a staff that was at first minuscule, tiny enough to fit in a former darkroom.

IT WOULD BE RETRO-MYTHOLOGIZING if I said we even thought about whether this step would be consistent with the founding vision of the school of journalism. In 1960, the school was forty-eight years old. It had opened in the fall of 1912 under the mandate of an unusual charter—a 1904 essay by the publisher Joseph Pulitzer, who had died in 1911, setting out in detail his vision for the school he had endowed—as a new kind of institution that would not only train but educate students as journalists, to make them not only skillful but thoughtful, ready to play a greater part in the functioning of American democracy and the preservation of the republic.

Much like its author, the essay was masterly but impossible. In the school's early years, a strenuous effort to follow Pulitzer's dicta exhausted both faculty and students (there was even a brief strike), and the Pulitzer vision began to give way to budgetary and human realities. The school—and the university—reined in the program. Its scope diminished, settling after two decades into a compact single-year graduate curriculum, tailored to the demands of the Great Depression, aimed less at a broad education—a task to be left to undergraduate institutions—than at giving students skills that would make them immediately employable. As this plan played out, it meant the admission of no more literary types and very few women. As for Pulitzer, he was rarely mentioned beyond obligatory references in the school's catalog. His name was



Man with a plan The author, circa 1960, saw a need for a 'nexus' of media criticism, wrote a memo to his boss, and the rest is history.

neither on the school nor on its building, which remained just plain "Journalism."

Such was the dim status of the founder of the school that once celebrated his birthday annually. By 1960, when we set off to create the *Columbia Journalism Review*, so far were our minds from Pulitzer that the magazine's opening policy statement failed to mention him. Nor did we give much thought to the possibility that we might be imposing a substantial burden, lasting for decades, on the school that he founded. The unasked question was: Would the *Columbia Journalism Review* be an

enterprise consistent with the founding goals of the institution? Unasked, it was unanswered.

Perhaps now, when CJR is—incredibly to me—publishing its fiftieth-anniversary issue, and as the school approaches its centennial, we can look at the matter more closely.

THE PRIMA FACIE CASE IS EASY TO MAKE. Pulitzer's 1904 essay, "The College of Journalism," abounds in references to criticism, evaluation, or improvement of journalism, albeit in a classroom context, rather than in a magazine. The

quotation at the start of this essay is the most extended, but there are others:

Every issue of a newspaper represents a battle—a battle for excellence. When the editor reads it and compares it with its rivals he knows that he has scored a victory or suffered a defeat. Might not the study of the most notable of these battles of the press be useful to the student of journalism as is the study of military battles to the student of war?

As yet the journalist works alone.... But if the future editors of the city had... a recognized professional meeting place in which they could come together informally and discuss matters of common interest, would they not eventually develop a professional pride that would enable them to work in concert for the public good?... Such a spirit would be the surest guaranty against the control of the press by powerful financial interests—not an imaginary danger by any means.

By far the largest part of the American press is honest, although partisan. It means to do right; it would like to know how. To strengthen the resolution and give its wisdom the indispensable basis of knowledge and independence is the object of training on journalism.

And there are more. Pulitzer made clear that he not only would allow but would advocate frank discussion of the press. The only means he specified for recognizing merit was his provision for the Pulitzer Prizes, which are still administered out of the journalism school. But almost all of the rest of the evaluation he had advocated had all but vanished with the shrinking of the curriculum. The *Columbia Journalism Review* can be said to have filled that vacuum.

Can be said, indeed; but has it? In recent years, Dean Nicholas Lemann has refocused the school on the Pulitzer ideals. So it is more than an abstract question to ask whether the *Review* has helped carry out Pulitzer's vision.

Many of the dozens, perhaps even the few hundreds, of people who have been associated with the *Review* can confirm that the *Review*'s relations with its parent institution have not always been smooth. The seven deans who have served in the life of the *Review* have

had to be conscious of the substantial resources that must go into sustaining even a small magazine, as the *Review* has been and remains. At least one dean feared that stories in the *Review* were reducing financial support for the school; another dropped hints that the ax was at hand. And it is hard not to believe that any dean did not think, at least momentarily, how much simpler life might be without CJR.

Still, over five decades the institution's support for the *Review* has been strong. The first year or two would have been impossible without a line of credit extended to the *Review* by Columbia's president, Grayson Kirk, before his time of troubles. Deans labored to keep a flow of financial support coming to the magazine, which was destined rarely, until recent years, to break even. Ed Barrett in particular continued to seek backing for

When we made errors, we were treated with scorn.

the *Review* even after he stepped down from the deanship, while he served a decade as publisher. But many others have scrambled to gain for the magazine the support it now receives, advertising and circulation revenue having fallen well short of sufficiency.

By my count, the *Review* has had ten editors (counting my own two terms as two people), an average tenure of five years. The incumbent, Mike Hoyt, has outlasted us all. The round figure fails to suggest the turbulence that has frequently enveloped the position. My successor, Al Balk, found the school and its faculty so little to his liking that he proposed severing the magazine's ties with Columbia. His successor, Ken Pierce—encouraged by Fred Friendly's suggestion that CJR could be the *Atlantic Monthly* of journalism magazines—had a vision of a bigger, more ambitious CJR, broader in scope and influence. There were multiple redesigns and fresh starts, each costly. Editors fought with deans (I did) and deans

by and large won. One editor even obtained a treaty of non-interference before he took the job.

From the beginning, the underlying strength of the *Review* was the community that gathered around it. In the early years, we were bolstered by a cluster of faithful stringers scattered across the country. Members of the faculty pitched in—Louis M. Starr as books editor, Larry Pinkham and Penn Kimball as writers and manuscript readers, and others as well. A stream of support came from faculty at other journalism schools. Professionals seemed to come out of nowhere, attracted by the opportunity to speak out. We were especially lucky in Washington, recruiting Ben Bagdikian to do a "letter" in each issue, a task later ably taken up by Jules Witcover.

Most of all, we benefited from the urgency of the issues of those decades; topics for stories fell into our laps—the Kennedy administration and its abrupt end, Vietnam, newspaper strikes, the civil rights movement, antiwar upheavals. Journalism's involvement in each of these issues demanded unblinking evaluation, and by and large we found writers who could do the job.

There was static. When we made errors—and there were more than I like to remember—we were treated with deep scorn. More often, adverse reactions came from those who simply didn't like what CJR had printed. We published letters to the editor, of course, but a standard tactic was for the offender to go over our heads to the president. The university's support, at least in that era, was unwavering. We got sometimes grudging acknowledgment from the various professional associations and a very cold shoulder from the American Press Institute, which in those days had its headquarters a few floors below us. Wes Gallagher, who had just become general manager of The Associated Press, raised the most serious challenge—a contention that a journalism school had no business criticizing the press, and he and the dean carried on a lively debate. Neither convinced the other.

THE STRIKING THING TO ME IS HOW THE basic character of the *Review* has persisted through earthquakes, external and internal. I still believe that I can

see artifacts of the *Review* of my era in today's issues. And I flatter myself that what the *Review* was doing in its first decades would still, I think, be recognized as the same kind of work CJR is doing now, given allowance for our quaintness of approach and false starts. We tried to grasp the essentials of what journalism is doing, tried to determine whether it is being done well or ill, how it might do better, how it is to survive and maintain its freedom in our social and political system. CJR remains a serious magazine without scholarly apparatus, aimed at generalists rather than specialists. The biggest change, of course, is the online edition of CJR, which gives the publication a timeliness and responsiveness that I could only dream of back in the 1960s.

Although there have been lapses, a lot of what the *Review* has published would, I hope, meet Pulitzer's standards. In its earlier decades I think of Ben Bagdikian's dissection of DuPont ownership of the Wilmington, Delaware, newspapers; Richard Reeves's article on the closing of the *Newark Evening News*, for which CJR had to withstand a libel suit; the series developed by senior editor Jon Swan on coverage of occupational safety and health issues. These are arbitrary examples from my own experience. The important point is that there has now been a fifty-year flow, and it shows no sign of ceasing.

Having left as editor for the last time when I was in early middle age, I used to resist the notion that the magazine would be the most singular item in my obit. Now, looking at how it has flourished for all these decades, I am willing and pleased to have CJR writ next to my name. I would hope that, were he in communication, Joseph Pulitzer might assent to being linked to CJR as well, although, given the man's temperament, he would no doubt be driving its editors crazy. **CJR**

JAMES BOYLAN is the founding editor of the Columbia Journalism Review and continues to write regular book reviews for the magazine. He is professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where he taught journalism and history from 1979 to 1991. He was a member of the journalism faculty at Columbia (1957–1979), and is the editor of a history, Pulitzer's School: Columbia University's School of Journalism, 1903–2003.

In Our Time

The editor takes stock

ON MY FIRST DAY AT THE COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW, THE EDITORS WERE reading page proofs for an upcoming issue, and if you found a glitch, the editor who had read the piece before you had to pitch a coin into a pizza-fund jar—a dime to a quarter, depending on the grievousness of the error. This provided a quick insight into the economics of the place. Also, it was fun. I thought, maybe I could work here for a while.

So, I did. The copy we were reading that fall day was for the twenty-fifth anniversary issue, and here we are—zip!—at the fiftieth, trying to peer into the past and the future, as I will here. I see that Jim Boylan, CJR's founding editor, stole all the Pulitzer quotes for his essay on the previous pages. So if you don't mind, I'll start this on a personal note and save the mission material for the end.

I came to CJR as half of a junior editor, splitting the position with my wife, Mary Ellen Schoonmaker, as we had done before on the copy desk at *BusinessWeek*. We took bimonthly turns, one of us working at the magazine while the other tended toddlers and wrote freelance. In one of my at-home stints, I wrote a long piece for CJR. Mary Ellen delivered the manuscript, and her desk was positioned in a way that allowed her to observe the reaction of the editor, a thin and classy man named Spencer Klaw. "He danced," she whispered to me on the phone. "What?" I said. "He danced," she said, "in the hall." Thus was the hook set.

Klaw, who died in 2004, edited the magazine from 1980 to 1989. If I was ever going to be an editor, I thought in those days, here was the model. He didn't scare anybody; you just didn't want to disappoint him. His lieutenants were a bear of a man named Jon Swan, who spun straw prose into gold overnight, like Rumplestiltskin, and the steely Gloria Cooper, passionate and smart. Some time before I started, the legend goes, Gloria detected inadequate valuation of her work, vis-a-vis Jon's work, and secretly wrote an unsigned commentary, overnight, on Jon's typewriter. When Spencer praised the puzzled Jon the following morning, Gloria was all cat and canary.

This is a good moment to thank all of them for caring for the flame that Jim Boylan and his colleagues lit back in 1961, and to thank all the editors and staff members before and after them. In my time, Suzanne Levine was the editor after Spencer, and led the magazine in a fairly gutsy fashion between 1989 and 1997. In 1994, she sent Trudy Lieberman to write about David Bossie, the activist who at the time was feeding Whitewater gumbo to reporters. We could not obtain a photo, so Suzanne hired a police artist, who revised and revised his sketch until Trudy said, bingo!—that's the guy. Marshall Loeb came next, from 1997 to 1999, and

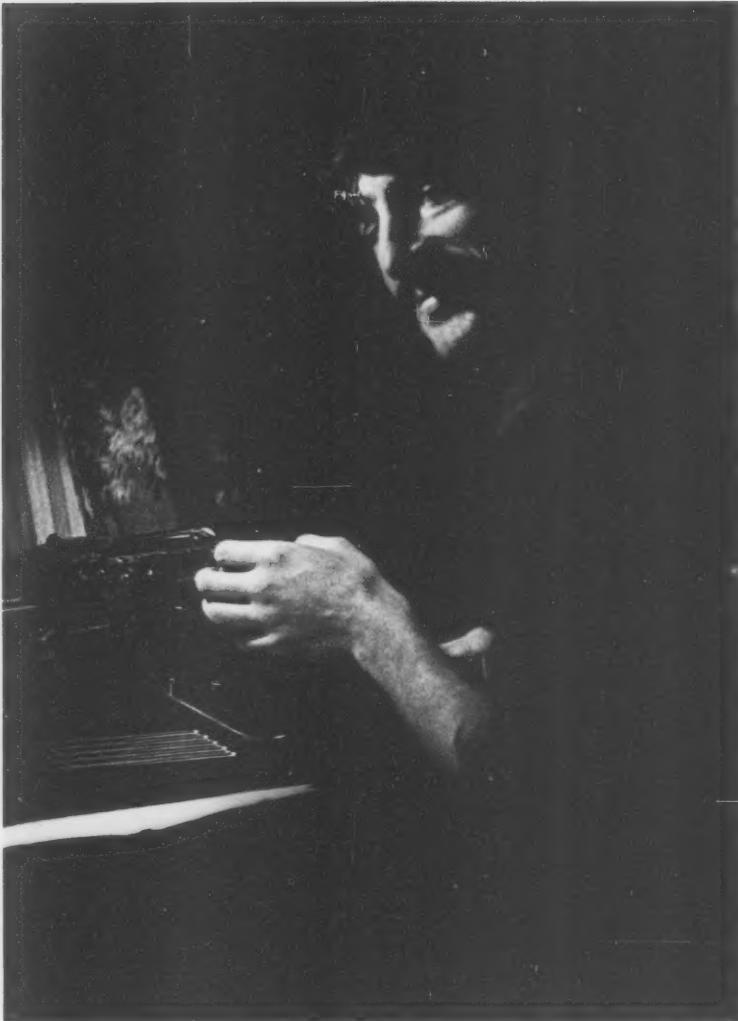
pushed the magazine in a slicker direction that reflected his roots at *Fortune* and *Money*. I have a memory of Marshall walking into the office early one morning with two immense suitcases, after what must have been a grueling all-night flight from China. He was in his seventies by then, but he dove into the pile of papers on his desk with what looked to me like rapture.

It is David Laventhal whom I would personally like to thank most of all. David was named CJR's publisher in 1999, and shortly after that its chairman and editorial director. This was after a career in which he had re-shaped a great swath of the newspaper landscape, in an era in which the big dailies were aiming for the stars. He more or less invented the Style section at *The Washington Post*, helped build *Newsday* into a powerhouse as its editor and then its publisher; he served as publisher at the *Los Angeles Times* and then as president of Times Mirror. He liked to stretch journalistic ambitions and boundaries and understood that CJR was born to agitate for exactly that agenda. In 2000, he installed me as executive editor and Brent Cunningham as managing editor—pilot and co-pilot—and kindly eased us into the roles as he eased his way toward retirement.

David and I more or less took turns doing issues for a while, and one of my early ones was a big package on newsroom morale, complete with a survey and pretty cool cover art. I was proud for about a week. It arrived in people's mailboxes around September 11, 2001, after which nobody ever thought much about newsroom morale again.

UNTIL SHORTLY BEFORE WE PUT TOGETHER this fiftieth anniversary issue, I had not stopped to realize that I've been running the editorial side of CJR for a decade. Which is nice. It's never been a particularly safe position, given that dreams of solvency and greater impact regularly elicit new beginnings, and given that our audience tends to include a set of journalists who assume they could do a better job with it, an indeterminate subset of which may be right. So I feel lucky. To quote Dr. Seuss, *These things are fun, and fun is good.*

I mean the working kind of fun. We redesigned the magazine twice in that



Let's go It dawned on the author that journalism might require typing, so he learned on his dad's old Underwood. Larger lessons would come later.

period. We published a book, *Reporting Iraq*, to be proud of. We won some shiny prizes. We became a better citizen of the world, looking more often beyond the borders of the United States. We wrestled hard, sometimes well, with the technical, economic, and cultural shock waves that have so deeply shaken journalism in this period. It has been, you may have noticed, some kind of decade.

In 2004, we built and staffed a website to cover the coverage of presidential politics, later merging that into CJR.org to create a handsome six-desk press

criticism-and-analysis machine. There we cover the coverage of politics and policy, in a time of ferocious and context-free debate (Campaign Desk); business and finance, during a killer recession (The Audit); science and the environment, at a moment when a serious presidential candidate can deny evolution (The Observatory); news innovation and economics, in the middle of a wild and unpredictable interregnum for the business (The News Frontier, and The News Frontier Database); media issues and occurrences (Behind the News); and journalism-related books and cul-

ture (Page Views). A sharp crew of writers, thoughtful and fast, works under the steady hand of Justin Peters and, in the case of The Audit, Dean Starkman. There was a period when web and print did not harmonize here, when there were budget wars and a wall—metaphoric and literal—between CJR print and CJR digital. We took it down. The young staff, digital to their bones, is eager to write for the fifty-year-old print magazine, too, which makes me happy.

In print, I look back at the early part of the decade and wish we had some of those cover stories back. With a bimonthly you only get six at-bats a year, and you want a home run every time. Two that we did hit over the wall in those years are Brent Cunningham's "Re-thinking Objectivity" in July 2003 and Liz Cox Barrett's "Imagine" from that January, in which she set up several brainstorming parties of young newspaper reporters all over America and constructed a vision of a dream daily out of their collective mind.

I do think our on-base percentage rose steadily through the years. I am proud of just about all of the Second Read features we have published in the back of the book, in which writers recall a book that helped shape them, or that should not be forgotten. I am particularly proud of "Into the Abyss," our cover piece in November 2006, which presented the voices of the journalists covering Iraq at its worst, in oral-history fashion, and which would become *Reporting Iraq*; of Michael Shapiro's portrait of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in agony, in the March issue that year; and of Eric Umansky's treatise on the coverage of torture, in the September issue. In 2008, I thought Lawrence Lanahan's layering of *The Wire* against urban journalism in real-life Baltimore, from January 2008, was a revelation, and so was Bree Nordenson's exploration of the ramifications of information overload, in November. In 2009, we looked at the future of journalism in three separate cover packages, from three perspectives, and won a lovely crystal media-criticism trophy from Penn State for our efforts, which is sparkling above my desk as I write.

That year also brought Dean Starkman's May cover piece on the failure of

the business press in the run-up to the financial meltdown, the kind of press criticism this magazine was born to produce. (It will be expanded into a CJR book, *The Watchdog That Didn't Bark*, next year, with our new books partner, Columbia University Press.) Starkman had another winner in 2010, with his "Hamster Wheel" piece on the great newsroom speedup and its journalistic costs. Moe Tkacik's "Look at Me!", a barbed critique of journalism in the age of branding, was loved or hated by all who read it. I loved it. And I have loved most of our cover pieces this year, and much of the rest of what has been in between the covers. What can I tell you?

IF THIS IS STARTING TO SOUND NOSTALGIC, it is somewhat nostalgic. I am not going anywhere and, God willing, will continue as CJR's executive editor for a good run. What is new is that thanks to a generous funder, CJR is in the process of hiring an editor in chief, to whom I will report, and with whom I hope to launch this place into the next half century. Among other things the editor in chief will be, I am told, is someone who enjoys giving speeches and being on panels about the future more than I do (which is not so much). That editor will find there is plenty of work to share.

As an orientation exercise, perhaps the new editor and I will listen together to my greatest-hits phone-message collection. I have saved one from the late David Halberstam, for example. Imagine a voice that sounds exactly like God, telling you emphatically he is not used to people messing with his copy. Another is from Richard Johnson, who once wrote an oily gossip column for the *New York Post*. The message begins: "I am doing a story about how the *Columbia Journalism Review* has embarrassed itself..." (Actually, we had done no such thing.) On the other side of the ledger is an e-mail from a political science major named Julian from Canada who said he had come across CJR in the bookstore where he works. What Julian wanted to know is this: "It seems you guys are not a huge magazine, and thus I've been buying every issue when I see it at work (as an employee I could just borrow it for free) in order to help support you guys.

I was just wondering, would I be more helpful to your continued survival as a publication if I subscribed?" God bless you, Julian. If you need an internship, just call.

One message that I erased, unfortunately, came from Seymour Hersh, but I remember it vividly and can supply a dramatic re-enactment: Scott Sherman, a longtime contributing editor to CJR, was reporting his terrific 2003 profile

people, because, hey, look at them. I cannot say enough about these hard-working, wicked-smart, and articulate writers and editors. And thanks to all those great free-lance writers through all those years, too—except the ones who were late.

Finally, you, the reader, without whom, who cares? All of us connected to CJR—staff and readers, friends and enemies—seem to know that we are

All of us connected to CJR know that we are part of a conversation that matters. Journalism matters. This is something we know more deeply now that it seems to be a resource we can no longer take for granted.

of the great investigative reporter. A dispute erupted about whether a nice anecdote that Scott had witnessed was on the record, or off. The phone message went this way: "Hoyt? Hersh. Who the fuck is Scott Sherman and what the fuck is he doing? What he's doing is wrong. It's wrong!" This was followed by the sound of a phone slamming down. Everyone survived, including Scott, and I want to thank Seymour Hersh for his kind letter to CJR at fifty, which you can read on page 19, as well as for his years of indispensable investigations.

WHILE I AM EXPRESSING GRATITUDE, I want to thank Victor Navasky, CJR's wise and resourceful chairman, who has done nothing less than keep this place in the black and glued together, with the help of the stalwart Dennis Giza, CJR's fiscal compass, and our co-chairman, Peter Osnos. I want to also thank our dean, Nicholas Lemann, who has given CJR nothing but support and good ideas, and absorbed more arrows on our behalf than we'll ever know.

And then there is the staff. One editorial skill I am quite confident I have is the ability to hire strong and creative

part of a conversation that matters. Journalism matters. This is something we know even more deeply now that it seems to be a resource we can no longer take for granted, like the air.

Two weeks before I went to journalism school, back in Missouri and back in the day, it dawned on me that reporters probably had to type. So I bought a used textbook, covered the keys with little red stickers as the book suggested, and learned how. You can see the typewriter, my father's Underwood, in the accompanying photo of the guy with the mustache and no clue of what lies ahead.

The real lesson came much later, after years on the job: that journalism is not all that difficult, really, but journalism of value is difficult indeed. CJR is that voice saying it is worth the effort. I cannot express the goal we share here better than Jim Boylan did fifty years ago in CJR's founding editorial, which you can read on page 17—in that line about the need for journalism that is a match for the complications of the age.

Our age is most complicated. It requires a level of journalism to match it. CJR can help with that. Let's go. CJR

MIKE HOYT is CJR's executive editor.

Wishing CJR, its staff, readers and supporters another
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The Moments

Fifty years of media culture, as captured by Magnum photographers



The way it was Walter Cronkite covers Nikita Khrushchev's visit to the US



Magnum Photos, founded during the most glorious age of photojournalism, has always represented a dream of how journalism can be structured: it's a members-only cooperative, controlled by the photographers themselves, whose guiding principle is to honor and promote great work. Would that print journalists could ever come up with an enduring organization so independent, communitarian, and pure of soul and spirit!

What Magnum photographers generally do is go cover something of importance that can be brought to life visually; in the aggregate, Magnum's work is a great historical document. The late John Szarkowski, who ran the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art for years, once wrote a history of photography called *Mirrors and Windows*. The Magnum photographers fall into the windows

category: they have consistently looked outward at the world, rather than, in any obvious way, inward at their souls.

But in the course of photographing practically everything, the Magnum photographers captured a lot of images of journalists at work. They weren't operating as conscious self-examiners of their profession, but they have given us a portrait of the profession. *Columbia Journalism Review* has selected some of these images and reproduced them here.

The immediately striking aspect of just about all of the pictures taken in the twentieth century is how dated



Camelot
JFK, here in 1961, was the first president to have regular live televised press conferences

they seem. It isn't just that the technology journalists used—giant television cameras, land-line telephones—is gone. It's that the technology, interacting with the politics and culture and professional mores of the time, generated a role for journalists that feels as if it's vanishing. Reporters here array themselves in packs around holders of official power, in ritualized settings like trials and conventions. They have only group access to the news, highly restricted in time and space. Often, they literally work inside pens. And one of the features of their hyper-organized social order is that it needs a handful of journalistic authority figures at the top—Walter Cronkite, David Brinkley, Barbara Walters—who can serve as the symbols of personal transmission between limited, routinized news and a passive, receiving public.

Press scrums still exist, of course, but the last few images

here get across how different twenty-first century journalism is. The cameras and phones are tiny, cheap, and mobile; news events aren't so staged and scheduled; the bright categorical lines separating newsmakers, journalists, and the public have blurred. And the story itself obviously isn't so much about great-power competition as it once was.

Because these pictures don't represent an intentional comprehensive study of journalism, they miss a great deal—like writers writing. Still, the older pictures communicate claustrophobia. Oh, to be liberated from these enclosures in which so much of journalism had to be practiced! But one doesn't want to be so completely liberated that the profession itself disappears. The question the pictures raise is whether, set free, journalists will be able to make a case for their necessity. That didn't used to be part of our mission, but it is now.

—Nicholas Lemann

clockwise from below

The dream Martin Luther King Jr. at a press conference in Birmingham, 1962

TV rising Alan Whicker, England's top interviewer in the '60s, doing a show on beauty pageants

How stars are born Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, here in 1974, made journalism glamorous

Before Gaga The press frenzy around The Beatles presaged the rise of celebrity news









clockwise from above

Sporting Photographers jostle in front of the arrival podium in Paris at the end of the Tour de France, 1985

Old school (l-r) In 1984, James LeMoine of *The New York Times*, Sam Dillon of *The Miami Herald*, and Julia Preston of *The Washington Post* file stories from El Salvador

Scrum President Nixon and President Anwar Sadat on a train to Alexandria, Egypt, 1974





clockwise from left

Trailblazer David Brinkley, seen here in 1988, defined the American TV news personality for several generations of broadcasters.

Wall-to-wall war Satellite technology enabled a new kind of television coverage in the first Gulf War.

Bang-bang club Photographers scramble in front of US troops during the 1994 invasion of Haiti.

Lightning rod Pope John Paul II roiled France when he visited in 1996. Here, photographers chronicle his mass in Reims.

clockwise from bottom left

On the brink A French journalist files his story from Peshawar, Pakistan, in October 2001

Covering the world CNN's Christiane Amanpour concentrates before a take in Isfahan, Iran, 1997

Infamy Stunned New Yorkers watch—and photograph—the World Trade Center as it burns on 9/11







clockwise from above

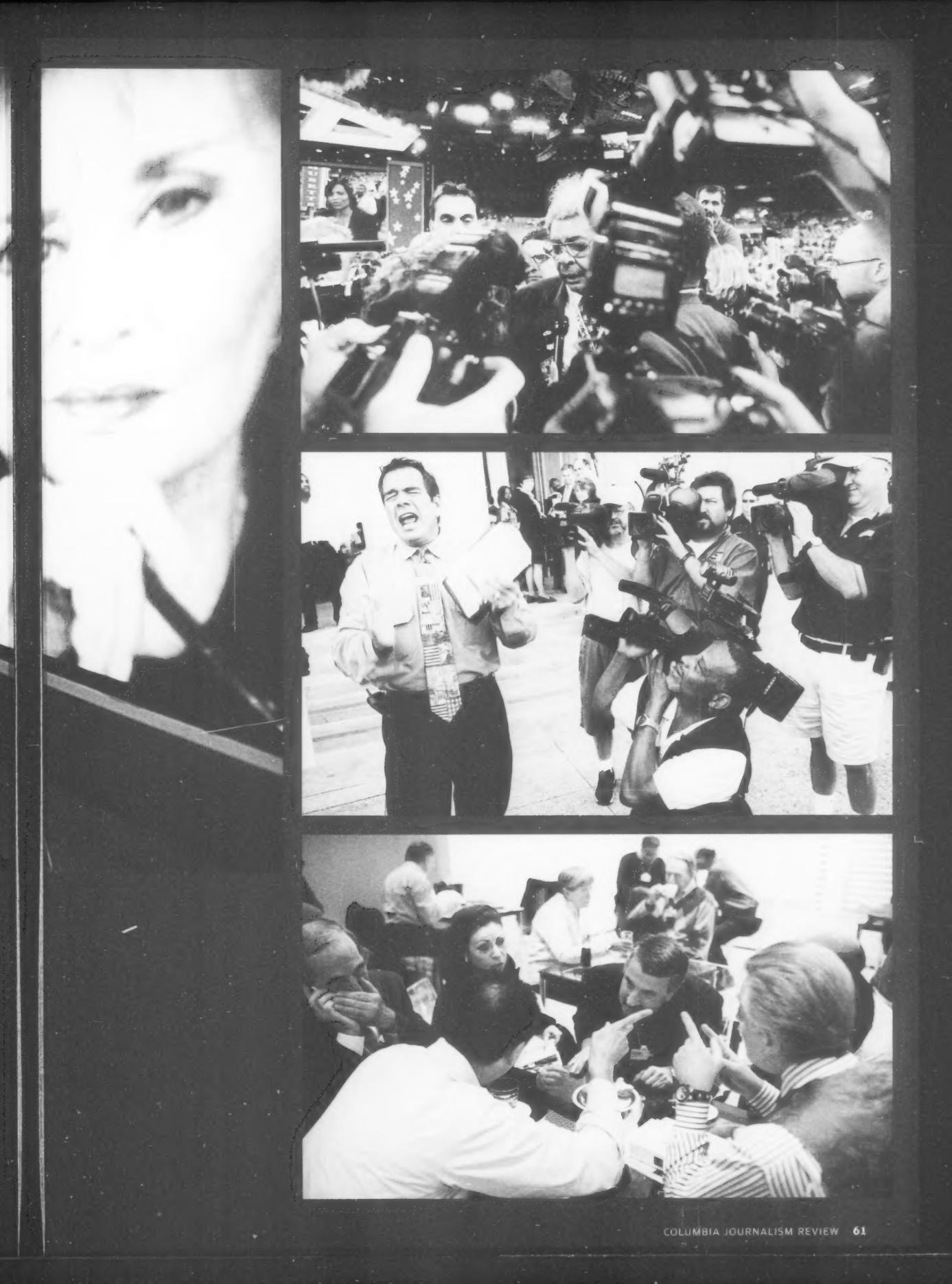
Icon Barbara Walters, seen here at ABC studios in 2001, was the first female co-anchor of an evening news broadcast

On message Don King spins for the cameras at the GOP convention in New York City, 2004

Hellfire A fundamentalist pastor prays for Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore, who was dismissed for refusing to remove the Ten Commandments from the courthouse entrance, 2003

Insiders Thomas Friedman at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, 2006

CREDITS PAGE 49: ERICH HARTMANN, 50-51; CORNELL CAPA, 52-53; BRUCE DAVIDSON, DAVID HURN, WAYNE MILLER, 54-55; JOHN VINK, SUSAN MEISELAS, RENE BURRI, 56-57; ALEX WEBB, ABBA, 58-59; PETER MARLOW, ABBA, SUSAN MEISELAS, 60-61; BRUCE DAVIDSON, LARRY TOWELL, ABBA, RICHARD KALVAR, 62; ALEX MAJOLI, THOMAS DWORZAK





top to bottom

Arab Spring In 2011, protesters used social media to bring events in Cairo's Tahrir Square to the world

Toppled A Qaddafi impersonator is recorded by anti-government protesters in Benghazi, Libya, 2011

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The Newspaper That Almost Seized the Future

The San Jose Mercury News, Silicon Valley's own daily, was poised to ride the digital whirlwind. What happened?

BY MICHAEL SHAPIRO

1. 'It Was Written'

Randall Keith and I are talking about the past when his boss, Dave Butler, slides open a glass door, eases his long frame into a chair, plants his feet on the conference room table, and makes clear by his weary affect that the topic does not interest him. ¶ Instead, this is what Butler wants to talk about when he talks about his newspaper, the *San Jose Mercury News*: all the many readers—2.7 million weekly, in print and online when you factor in the

Merc's smaller sister papers across the Bay Area; the *Merc's* new "spiffy" app; its willingness to focus on the "important stuff" rather than compete with "every school board that has a website" and all the many tech bloggers—"I have no idea how many blogs are dedicated to covering Apple"—because, he says, the *Merc* is "willing to be more interesting." He wants to talk about making money, too, because the *Merc* makes some. How much he will not say, except that most of the profits still come from print.

Dave Butler has been a newspaperman since 1972, a self-described journeyman who became the editor of the *Mercury News* in 2008. The paper had been sold two years earlier by its longtime parent company, Knight Ridder, to the McClatchy Company. McClatchy in turn quickly sold it to MediaNews Group, whose chairman, Dean Singleton, put

Tales from the Disruption

This is the first in a series of special articles examining how the news business has been, and will be, shaped by the great digital revolution.

Butler in charge. Three months into the job, Butler wrote a memo to the staff, outlining a vision that could essentially be boiled down to a simple premise: the past could no longer animate the *Mercury News*. The days of four hundred people in the newsroom, revenues of \$300 million and profit margins north of 30 percent, a bureau in Hanoi, a Pulitzer for *foreign* news, Spanish and Vietnamese language editions, and a Sunday magazine, were gone. The staff of the *Merc*, now about half the size it was at its peak in the late 1990s, had no choice but to press on with vigor and a sense of mission: "Let's carve some new trails in the jungle of journalism!"

Butler has the advantage of having missed his paper's past, and so is unencumbered by the memory of what the place had been, not so long ago. Randall Keith knew. He had arrived earlier, in 1998, just in time to watch the great tech bubble inflate, carrying the *Merc* along with it. He had left a job as city editor of the Quincy, Massachusetts, *Patriot Ledger* to join a paper with a national reputation both for its journalism and its profitability. *Time* magazine had several years earlier dubbed the *Merc* the nation's most tech-savvy newspaper. Its revenues from classified advertising—especially recruitment ads for all those many high-tech companies whose every product rollout and inevitable IPO were covered by the paper's burgeoning business staff—had fueled ever more revenue, \$288 million the year Keith arrived.

The *Merc* was fat, ambitious, and admired in those days, in particular for the speed with which it had adapted to the great technological changes that were shaking the industry. It seemed destined, in fact, to master those disruptions, fitting for a paper whose widely read day-opening blog was called "Good Morning Silicon Valley."

The *Merc* was among the first daily newspapers in the country with an online presence, the first daily to put its entire content on that site, the first to use the site to break news, and among the first to migrate that burgeoning online content to the web. In the early 1990s, the joke among the paper's small online staff was that, given the still modest returns on its digital investment, the paper could still make a few bucks charging admission to all the visitors from papers across the country (and around the world) who showed up to see how they were doing it.

"It was a big adventure," Keith says. "It was a lot of fun."



A glimpse Before he ran the *Mercury News*, Robert Ingle worked for *The Miami Herald*, where he witnessed Viewtron, Knight Ridder's early experiment in electronic publishing. He used it between rounds of a televised boxing match to check the judges' scores, and was impressed.

THE MERC IS HEADQUARTERED IN A WHITE WEDDING CAKE of a building that sits off a highway, and across from a largely deserted mall. There is a red linotype machine in the lobby, and late on a rainy afternoon it seems to be the only splash of animation in a building where voices feel not so much hushed as absent. The conference room looks out onto a dim and quiet newsroom. Many of the people with whom Keith once worked are gone. After one of several rounds of newsroom layoffs, a photographer went through the building taking pictures not of people—the people had left—but of rows of empty cubicles, stacked computer terminals, blank bulletin boards, and vacant corridors.

Keith is managing editor of digital content for the *Merc* and for the Bay Area Newspaper Group, of which it is a part. He wants to make clear that while the past was a glorious time, he, like Butler, is thinking of the future because, as he puts it, there is always another story to cover.

"Would you like to have more?" Butler asks. "Yes. But you play the cards you got. You can either be a wimp, and bitch and moan. Or you can go after the story."

For years, I had heard from friends who'd worked at the *Merc* what a terrific place it was, how the paper, which until the late 1970s had been "profoundly mediocre," as one long-time editor put it, had twenty years later become so rich and successful that it was setting its sights on becoming nothing less than the "best in the West." The *Merc* was one of the jewels of the most respected chain in the business—Knight Ridder, then the owner of thirty-one papers, including Pulitzer machines like *The Miami Herald* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Merc*, which had won one in 1986 for its coverage of Ferdinand Marcos's hidden wealth, and again in 1990 for its coverage of the San Francisco earthquake.

Then, things began slipping.

And when the end came in 2006, when Knight Ridder, under the most extreme pressure from its institutional investors, surrendered and sold itself, the people who had seen the *Mercury News* not as a stepping stone but as a destination, began trying to sort out who, exactly, was responsible.

They are hardly alone. There is no shortage of reporters of a certain age for whom the past is darkened by memories of the slow erosion of the places where they labored and the work that they did. The story of the *Merc*'s rise and decline—there is nothing so telling as only four pages of midweek classifieds—mirrors the story of what has occurred at so many once big and proud newspapers across the country that are still trying to make sense of what happened to them over the past decade and what lessons might be drawn from all the cataclysmic change.

But the fall of the *San Jose Mercury News* was different, because the *Merc*, Silicon Valley's paper, had advantages enjoyed by few other dailies—in where it was based, in the affluence of its readers, in its ownership of one of the great transformative stories of the age. The *Merc* had also been quicker than most to recognize the change that was coming. And from those early glimpses, clues began to emerge about the shape of a news business that, if they were to be heeded and believed, would bear little resemblance to the one that existed in the early 1990s.

The signs of change, and potential ways of adapting to it, were there for anyone to see. Most did not. Not even the forward-looking men and women at the *Mercury News* and the chain that owned it. So it was that by the time Randall Keith arrived, that early advantage, that initial boldness, had dissipated. The *Merc* had become yet another newspaper trying to keep up.

Why did the *Merc* fail to seize the future? Was this the result of greed, stupidity, timidity, and blindness, as so many who worked there would suggest? Or was it the inevitable consequence of disruptive technology, a phenomenon whose most vulnerable targets are often the best-run companies?

I was soon to discover a great, almost visceral desire to assign blame, even now, especially among those who felt betrayed by people in whom they once placed their trust. Among the men and women who made the decisions, however, the tone was different. Perhaps, they suggested again and again, there was nothing anyone could have done to save the *Merc*, or Knight Ridder.

"Just because you see a locomotive hurtling down the track toward you doesn't mean you can get out of the way," says Bob Ryan. He had come to the paper in 1981, just as it was shaking off the torpor of the past. He had been a city editor and business editor, rising to deputy managing editor and then director of electronic publishing before moving to Knight Ridder's digital division—a progression that had allowed him to both see, and feel, the alternating pulses of excitement and resistance as the newspaper, and later the chain, tried and mostly failed to be a leader in a rapidly changing world. It left him sounding like a fatalist.

"It was written," he says. "It was going to happen."

But was it going to happen?

Was it written?

2. The Flawed Prophet

Robert Ingle came to San Jose to run the *Mercury*, and its smaller afternoon sister, the *News*, in 1981, with a reputation of being very smart and very much aware of it. He was bearded, stern, and most comfortable in the company of few people, preferably his own. He had come to the *Merc* from *The Miami Herald*, which he had joined as a copy editor in 1962, straight out of the University of Iowa. "I was a hot commodity because I said I wanted to do copy editing," he says. The job, he would soon discover, came with particular advantages for a young man for whom the processes by which things got done held great appeal.

Ingle's initiation to life at the *Herald* involved rotating from job to job, and this, he would later say, allowed him to learn every step through which a newspaper was put together. He worked with the engravers and the pressmen and became so skilled at the long-abandoned skill of setting lead type that the pressmen honored him with a typesetting tool—a ground-down putty knife used for wedging pieces of lead into empty spaces. The *Herald*, like so many other papers, was undergoing a profound shift in technology, from hot type to cold, which would soon result in the end of many

of the jobs Ingle had delighted in learning, along with the livelihoods of the men who had done them.

Within a year and a half of his arrival at the *Herald*, Ingle was promoted to assistant news editor, then news editor and, by the time of his departure, to managing editor. He did a stint as a reporter, too, to learn how the work was done. Then Knight Ridder sent him to the *Merc* to replace Larry Jinks, who had begun lifting the paper out of its historic mediocrity. Jinks, who moved to the corporate offices, was pleasant and accessible, which made him a difficult man for the diffident Ingle to follow. Still, he set about building on what Jinks had begun, adding sections—the Sunday magazine, and a stand-alone Monday business section, among them—but doing so with little, if any, consultation with those who worked for him. “Himself,” recalls Bob Ryan. “By himself.”

Ingle possessed a crystalline vision of the outcomes he desired. He was open to hearing ideas other than his own, but there was little hope of prevailing once he had made up his mind. So too did his staff learn that when he responded to a suggestion with his customary refrain—“That’s the stupidest fucking idea I’ve ever heard”—the rejoinder reflected an opinion, not a feeling. Nothing personal, as Ryan discovered when he asked Ingle if the paper would pay for him to take a community college computing class. “Stupidest fucking idea....,” Ingle replied.

The story suggests that Ingle had little interest in technology, which was not the case. Because more than anyone else, it would be Bob Ingle who would see the need to push his paper, and eventually Knight Ridder, to the forefront of the digital revolution. He had already witnessed how powerfully technology could alter the work newspapers did, and how disruptive it could be if things did not go right.

Not long before Ingle left Miami for San Jose, Knight Ridder had launched an experiment in distributing information without the use of paper. Viewtron, as it was called, used a videotex system both to carry news and, more importantly, to allow its subscribers to send messages, shop, and even bank through telephone lines that ran from terminals connected to television sets, and to a keyboard that everyone hated because it reminded them of an array of Chiclets.

The experiment was confined to the city of Coral Gables, Florida, where Bob Ingle happened to live and where he would later recall watching a prizefight on his television, and between rounds checking the judges’ scoring via his Viewtron terminal. This is not to suggest that that moment represented an epiphany: Viewtron was cumbersome, and it was expensive; the terminals cost \$600 and fees were \$12 a month, plus an additional \$1 an hour. Knight Ridder was pouring millions of dollars into an experiment whose purpose defied simple definition. “People thought videotex was going to be an electronic newspaper,” one of the experiment’s directors told *The Wall Street Journal* in 1985. “It’s something else, but we’re not exactly sure what yet.”

There was much to be admired in Knight Ridder’s commitment, in time and money, to Viewtron. The experiment, in fact, was part of a larger effort by the chain to diversify, especially in electronic publishing. For years, the operative verbs in stories about Knight Ridder were *acquired*—especially local cable television systems, and with them their lists of subscribers—and *posted*, as in ever higher earnings. The boldness, it was said, reflected the sensibilities of the Knights, especially John S. Knight, the guiding force of the chain he inherited from his father (and a Pulitzer Prize winner in his own right). In 1974, Knight had merged his papers—among them the *Herald* and the *Detroit Free Press*—with that of the Ridders. The Ridders owned many smaller, less celebrated enterprises, including *The Journal of Commerce*, which had famously allowed itself to be eclipsed by the upstart *Wall Street Journal* years earlier. It also owned the *San Jose Mercury* (and *evening News*).

Viewtron employed about 200 people tasked with providing its experimental service to a projected five thousand Coral Gables homes, and, if that worked, expanding Viewtron to other cities. But by 1984, with fewer than three thousand subscribers, Viewtron had already cost \$35 million, and a fifth of the staff was let go. The problem was that although the technology was innovative, it could not offer subscribers services they could not get more cheaply and conveniently elsewhere—in particular, in a newspaper.

Viewtron, Ingle had seen, presented “frames” of information. But the frames felt like a quarry; there was a disquieting sense of not knowing how far down the bottom lay. A newspaper page was, by contrast, assuringly finite. Users did like the “electronic mail” feature—though there were still few people with whom they could correspond. When the chain at last announced that it was abandoning the project—at a cost of \$50 million—the experiment, at least in the view of Knight Ridder’s chairman, James Batten, nonetheless offered an important lesson: “It is now clear that videotex is not likely to be a threat to either newspaper advertising or readership in the foreseeable future.”

That was 1986. Batten, a venerated leader, would not live to see how wrong he was. The failure of Viewtron—or rather, the extent to which Viewtron was ahead of its users, few of whom had home computers with high-speed modems—would haunt Knight Ridder. Experimenting, it was understood, though not explicitly said, was acceptable, so long as the cost of failure was minimal.

Still, experimentation, or at least the talk of experimentation, continued and in late 1989, Knight Ridder assigned Ingle to a task force charged with assessing the chain’s place in the future. Ingle hated it. “It was so frustrating,” he would recall. “People would sit around and try to forecast the price of newsprint in ten years.”

So Ingle did what he had always preferred doing: he set off by himself. Over several days in early January of 1990, he

Just because you see a locomotive hurtling down the track,’ says Bob Ryan, ‘doesn’t mean you can get out of the way.’

composed a "report" to P. Anthony Ridder, who then headed the chain's newspaper division, on where his paper might find a niche in the newly evolving world of electronic publishing. Four years had passed since the end of Viewtron, and Ingle quickly confronted what he called "some deep scars" left from an experiment that was, in his view, "premature."

"It would be nothing short of criminal," he wrote, "if the company that had the courage to launch Viewtron failed to seize the moment the market had turned."

INGLE'S 1990 REPORT WAS BOTH VISIONARY AND DEFENSIVE. He envisioned a world in which the personal computer and modem were ubiquitous, a world of flat panel screens, portable devices, and software that, as he put it, could act as information managers. He also saw a future in which people no longer organized themselves merely by physical proximity, but as virtual "communities of interest" connected electronically. All this and much that could not be predicted, he wrote, would surely happen.

The question was how his newspaper could position itself to be in the center of it all, and not be remanded to the periphery—and the inevitable oblivion—of change. Ingle believed in the newspaper, believed it would continue to matter to readers for years to come. But "to extend the life and preserve the franchise of the newspaper," he wrote, the *Merc* would have to absorb the new technologies into its work—not to replace the printed newspaper, but to augment it in a manner that readers could embrace.

The mistake of Viewtron, he wrote, was to impose a single innovation upon users who simply were not ready, or inclined, to adapt to it. Instead, he argued, the *Merc* and Knight Ridder should launch an altogether different kind of experiment, one that, at minimal cost—crucial after Viewtron—could instead offer readers a range of innovations whose fates they would decide both by the comments they offered, and, in time, by the features and services they selected.

Newspapers, Ingle argued, still enjoyed advantages no other institution could rival. Like newspapers across the country, the *Merc* dominated both the gathering and dissemination of news, and, crucially, remained the repository of vital information on finding jobs, homes, and cars. Newspaper people may not have wanted to admit it, but while the work they did may have made for an informed and entertained citizenry, it was the classifieds that many readers wanted and needed. Decades before anyone spoke of social media, and when online conversation was still limited to electronic bulletin boards, newspaper classified pages were where people came to communicate with one another about where to work and live.

Still, Ingle did offer a word of caution: newspapers' advantage would not last. Competition would surely come, although in what form or shape he did not say. So, to be ready, he wanted to create a laboratory that could use the emerging technologies as an "adjunct" to what the paper offered. To succeed, the laboratory would have to be a part of the newsroom, not separate from it. The staff—reporters, editors, sales staff—would all have to join in the experiment.

"Structuring the experiment as an enterprise separate from the newspaper would be crippling if not fatal," he wrote. "It would also be crippled if it were merely a collection of unconnected systems and services." This meant creating a platform that could offer readers not only more of what could not fit in the paper, but also a place where their voices could be heard. And where the *Merc* could track their preferences by monitoring traffic and signups.

"I've given the proposed project a working name of Mercury Center," he wrote. "It's not perfect, but it does convey nicely the concept: that the newspaper is at the center of information and communication in the community. We can happily adopt a better name if one pops up."

It stuck.

Ingle sent his report to Tony Ridder, who asked him to put together a business plan. It would be a year and a half until Ingle completed the proposal to launch his experiment. He blamed the delay on the demands of putting out a daily newspaper. He would, in time, grow weary of others offering the same excuse.

But at that moment, there seemed to be no great sense of urgency. Ingle's competition in 1990 consisted of several local weeklies and two mediocre newspapers an hour away in San Francisco. The afternoon *San Jose News* was gone, folded into the *Merc* in 1983. Even in Santa Clara County, only 13 percent of the homes had personal computers and modems. The technological innovation most widely used, Ingle noted, was the touch-tone telephone.

He had time; the market had not yet "turned." A few newsrooms had begun to dabble in the new technologies, but the work was proceeding haltingly. In Denver, the *Rocky Mountain News* had launched an eight-week videotex experiment. In Albuquerque, the *Tribune* had started an electronic version for personal computers. The *Omaha World-Herald* abandoned its videotex service in 1991, announcing that the "public just didn't buy it." Prodigy announced its one-millionth subscriber. America Online had not yet gone public with its \$62-million IPO.

In 1991, Knight Ridder posted \$2.26 billion in revenue, even as the economy was mired in a recession. The downturn cut into the *Merc*'s vaunted job listings—\$84.5 million that year—by 10 percent. This worried the paper's general manager, Kathy Yates. What would happen, she wondered, if the drop had been steeper? "What if we lose 25 percent?" she asked herself. "It's a totally different business."

And though classified revenue dropped by \$2 million in 1992, it rebounded by \$5.5 million the following year, and as it did Yates's concern seemed academic.

When the Mercury Center finally launched in 1993, only about a dozen newspapers had begun online versions. Ingle was still ahead of the pack. And, most importantly, his newspaper was, for all appearances, safe.

3. Bob Ingle's New Train Set

It would be nice to think that, at least early on, the story of the *Mercury News*'s embrace of the technologies that would transform the newspaper industry could reflect just that—an

embrace, an eagerness shared by the newsroom, the business side, and the sales and marketing staffs to join together in the great experiment.

In the spring of 1992, Bob Ingle began hiring a small staff to launch Mercury Center. He did not turn to technology people who for years had been flooding Silicon Valley, straight from Carnegie Mellon, MIT, Caltech, and, especially, Stanford.

Ingle also needed someone who could write code, and one of the few to be found in a newsroom was Chris Jennewein, who was director of information services at *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, where he had been working for thirteen years and where, he told Ingle the first time he asked, he was happy to stay. Ingle took a clever tack the second time, inviting Jennewein to visit. If Jennewein wasn't completely



The lab In 1992, Ingle hired a small staff, including Chris Jennewein, to launch and run Mercury Center, whose mission was to find a route to electronic publishing. It offered additional stories and listings, as well as conversation and search. The newsroom wasn't sold, but some readers were.

Stanford's wide footprint in Palo Alto and its growing list of tech-world alumni all-stars had helped make Santa Clara County one of the wealthiest and fastest growing regions in the country—the destination for every young man (and the rare young woman) who dreamed that the new application developed, apocryphally or not in a garage, would add their names to the burgeoning list of the suddenly vastly wealthy. Yahoo, whose co-founder, Jerry Yang, still came to work in jeans and T-shirts, had modeled a conference room after a garage, a bow to the not-so-distant past.

Ingle turned instead to newspaper people. There was a modest but growing coterie of journalists who, perhaps because technology was giving them a chance to soar, had staked out positions as their paper's tech person, whatever that meant. Bill Mitchell was one of them. He had returned to Knight Ridder's *Detroit Free Press*—after a tour at the chain's Washington bureau, an overseas post in Vienna, and a turn on the Knight Ridder team covering the first Gulf War—looking for something more than a new story. He was running the paper's fledgling audio-text and fax delivery systems when Ingle hired him to become the Mercury Center's director of electronic publishing, a job so novel it sounded exotic.

sold as he drove along US 101, past all those billboards for the high-tech companies he'd read about in the kinds of trade magazines to which few journalists then subscribed, then it was at lunch at the Silicon Valley Club when the deal was closed. "I want to hear from somebody who believes in the technology that things will change in journalism," Jennewein would recall saying, "that there's a future out there."

There was no shortage of tasks to be done to launch Mercury Center, tasks that bore little resemblance to the work of putting out a newspaper. The first was deciding who would host the site. Those few newspapers dabbling with electronic versions had used bulletin board software, or had thrown in with CompuServe and Prodigy, the largest of the Internet providers. But on a visit to Prodigy's offices in White Plains, New York, Ingle, whose penchant for candor was abrupt to the point of rudeness, told his hosts that their screens looked like "ransom notes." Instead, Ingle wanted to go with the smaller AOL, even though, he says, he did not much care for the company's president, Steve Case.

Still to be determined, however, was what, exactly, subscribers would get for their monthly \$9.95 fee (with additional hourly usage fees) aside from services AOL already provided. AOL's proprietary language, Rainman, did not

have much capacity for photographs or graphics. Navigation in 1992 was relatively slow—and connecting to the net glacial—which made reading the paper a far easier way to sort through the news.

But Mercury Center could do things the paper could not. It could carry legal documents, press conference transcripts, wire service stories not deemed sufficiently interesting to merit more than a brief in print. Not sufficiently interesting, that is, to a general audience. But perhaps they would be for the various niches among the *Merc's* 269,000 daily and 332,000 Sunday print readers, who might want to know more about a particular story than their neighbors—"communities of interest," as Ingle had called them. The site could, of course, include the content of the day's print paper, but that seemed secondary. The emphasis would be on *more*—more stories, listings, and advertising, too. And for those potential subscribers without home computers and modems, the Mercury Center would offer telephone and fax services for \$2.95 a month.

In the meantime, Mitchell had hired a marketing director and a sales representative, because despite Ingle's call for integrating the site into the life of the paper, the *Merc's* unionized sales staff saw the project as an intrusion on their time, or, for some, a threat to the way they did their business. The reaction was much the same in the newsroom, where Ingle had wedged his experiment into a corner near the features desk. One day, Chris Jennewein was carrying a boxed computer into the office when he heard someone say, "Look, there's Bob Ingle's new train set."

In reality, the imposition on the news side was minimal. No reporters were dedicated to the project. Two *Merc* copy editors joined Mercury Center as online editors, with the idea of rotating desk people through every six months. But the new frontiers were exciting, and the editors remained. One of them was Donna Lovell, who had come to the paper in 1989 and who was eager to stay on and, as she later put it, be "a part of the next big thing."

The next big thing, she began to see, resembled, at least in its organization, the analog world that preceded it. This made sense in that readers, long used to the way a newspaper presented things, might well balk at being asked to find what they wanted in unfamiliar ways. There would be boxes, just as there were print sections, for news, sports, entertainment, and ads. But there would be an altogether new feature, too, to be found in a box dubbed "communication." Readers would be able to use the electronic mail feature to send notes to writers, and even to offer their comments.

In late April 1993, the *Mercury News* began running small promotional ads, heralding the coming of its new electronic feature. Subscribers were directed to the paper's circulation department, which would mail them discs to be inserted in their home computers. The software would deliver them to a pale green page topped by the words, Welcome to Mercury Center.

BY THE TIME WILLIAM GLABERSON OF THE NEW YORK *Times* came to visit in early 1994, some five thousand new AOL subscribers had signed up to receive Mercury Center. The number, Glaberson noted, represented less than 20 percent of AOL's subscribers in the Bay Area and less than 2 percent of the *Merc's* readers. But Glaberson's report in the *Times* was all that Ingle, Mitchell, and their staff could have asked for. Even with new sites at the *Chicago Tribune*, Gannett's *Florida Today*, and a handful of other papers, it had taken less than a year for Mercury Center to emerge as arguably the most ambitious experiment in how to weave the new technologies into an existing news operation.

It was not only the volume of services that set it apart, but the extent to which the electronic services so dramatically expanded the definition of what it meant to be in the news business. Mercury Center, Glaberson noted, had carried an online chat with San Jose's mayor, offered its telephone-only subscribers recordings of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches, posted press releases (much to the newsroom's consternation), and had also made available archives of all stories that had appeared in the newspaper since 1985. The archives, which came with an additional fee, had proven to be particularly popular. Ingle had thought their greatest appeal would be to schoolchildren working on reports. But the traffic was heaviest during the day, suggesting that the biggest users were business people eager for information about their industries and competitors.

Ingle told Glaberson that he was envisioning a new breed of journalist, dispatched with the sort of equipment that would allow filing in all sorts of ways, not merely for print. He called them "multimedia reporters." Still, for the print side, the connection between the newspaper and Mercury Center involved little more than the addition of codes at the bottom of printed stories, so that readers could log on, or call in, for more. Some reporters had begun online conversations with their readers (everyone was asked to respond to reader e-mails). Others told Glaberson they saw the back and forth as peripheral to their work.

Ingle insisted that online conversation could transform the paper's connection with its readers, and prove an antidote to decades of slowly declining readership. "Our communication historically has been, 'we print it, you read it,'" he told Glaberson. "This changes everything."

Everything but the sensibilities of the people who worked for him. His diffidence aside, Ingle believed himself an adept salesman; as a young man in Iowa he had sold sweet corn door to door. But unlike the housewives who could discern the quality of corn by flicking off a kernel with a fingernail, his reporters and editors were proving a slower sell. Ingle could be a terror of a boss, quick to sever a head or two; he prided himself on having never lost a dismissal arbitration. Yet now he struggled to rally his newsroom. Time and again, requests to post an online item were met with reminders that there was a newspaper to put out.

Mercury Center quickly and dramatically expanded the definition of what it meant to be in the news business.

Among those who did not see the potential of Mercury Center, at least at first, was not a subordinate but a peer, Kathy Yates, the paper's general manager. Yates was that rare Stanford Business School graduate who chose a career in newspapers. She believed they performed such a vital service, even if under editors like Ingle they were not always good with money.

Yates did not much care for Ingle, whom she found difficult. Mercury Center had struck her as an unwise investment, one that she saw producing little revenue. Ad sales at Mercury Center, in fact, were minimal—Ingle and his people were frustrated with a sales staff that seemed to him unwilling or incapable of convincing their clients to enhance their print ads with a cheap online edition. What little revenue Mercury Center brought in came through subscriptions (with AOL taking its cut) and corporate sponsorships of such new, online products as the "mortgage hot line," which updated mortgage rates periodically over the day. Ingle reminded Yates that Mercury Center was adding subscribers. Yates remained unimpressed.

Revenue was so modest, in fact, that Mercury Center's marketing director, Barry Parr, later said that selling subscriptions felt like little more than "selling AOL for AOL." But Ingle, Parr, and their staff were already seeing a way to break out on their own.

In the fall of 1994, Mosaic Communications, a startup in nearby Mountain View, had introduced software that could shift users away from the narrow confines of their online providers and begin navigating their way through a source of information and communication that had previously been accessible only to a handful of university-based technologists: the World Wide Web. They named the browser Netscape. When Barry Parr showed Kathy Yates how it worked, her doubts about the potential of the digital world evaporated. No longer would Mercury Center be limited by its partnership with AOL. Instead, the *Merc* could become a portal to a world with seemingly limitless possibilities.

"This," she would recall thinking, "has just changed my career."

HOW IT WOULD CHANGE, SHE COULD NOT KNOW. BUT EVEN as Yates began to envision great possibilities for the *Mercury News* through the web, one of Knight Ridder's newest marketing people was forming a less sanguine view of the company's future.

Like Yates, Charlene Li had chosen newspapers as a career, one of only two graduates from the Harvard Business School class of 1993 to do so. She had joined the company that August, and was assigned to develop new products, and with them, new sources of revenue. Li began working with the Mercury Center's Barry Parr and helped develop an idea for an event that might better position the online service—an electronics fair. The event took place at the San Jose Convention Center and featured products by many of the area's high-tech firms.

The fair broke even, and while in other circumstances this might have represented success—it is not uncommon

for such events to lose money for the first two years—Knight Ridder abandoned the project. By the time she left in 1995, Li had learned two important lessons about innovation at the company: all new ideas had to go through an innovation committee ("an oxymoron," she would later say) and had to produce revenue within six months.

Li spent her days with newspaper people and her evenings with technology people. The newspaper people, she saw, were still burdened by the failure of Viewtron. But the technology people regarded failure differently; it was a part of their world, because they lived in a world of risk. The people with whom she spent her days were, by the nature of their success, cautious, protective, defensive, and as a result, fearful. Not so the people with whom she hung out at night.

"This is a company," she would recall thinking, "that's gonna get eaten alive."

4. The Heir

James Batten died of a malignant brain tumor in June 1995. He was fifty-nine years old and in the years after his death, the great regard with which he was already held only grew deeper. Batten was, above all, a newspaperman and in a chain that placed great value on its journalism, Batten, who had covered the civil rights movement and, from Washington, southern politics, had proven himself a worthy leader. That he had died relatively young only enhanced the belief that had he lived, Knight Ridder's fate might have been different. The sentiment said as much about Batten as it did about his successor, Tony Ridder.

Ridder was fifty-five, blond, handsome, athletic, and pleasant, the sort of man who appeared careful not to give offense, but who, in the view of his detractors, did so just the same. The problem was not merely that he was a Ridder in a company that had been dominated by the Knights and their spiritual heirs, like Batten. Tony Ridder, it was often said, *acted* like a Ridder, which was to say that his primary interest, his critics never tired of insisting, lay not with the state of the company's journalism but in the value of its stock. He did himself no favors when, soon after replacing Batten as chairman, he was asked at a meeting of Knight Ridder editors what kept him up at night. At a moment ripe for a public embrace of the company's journalistic legacy, Ridder instead offered a candid, if unwise, reply: "electronic classified."

His critics aside, Ridder had a point—not a romantic one, but an important point just the same. Tony Ridder, who did not respond to requests to speak with me for this story, may have displayed the sensibilities of an accountant. But he knew a nightmare when he saw one coming.

At that moment, however, his unsettled view was not widely shared. Batten had bequeathed him a prosperous company that was only getting richer. Knight Ridder posted \$2.8 billion in revenue in 1995, a \$100 million increase over 1994, which, in turn, reflected an increase of \$200 million over 1993. Advertising, which generally accounted for three-quarters of newspaper revenues, was propelling the growth. And while retail advertising produced more dollars, classifieds, which took fewer people to produce, were more profitable. In fact,

classified revenue had grown by 13 percent in 1995, largely fueled by a 36 percent jump in employment listings at the *Mercury News*, where Ridder had worked from 1964 to 1986, serving as business manager, then general manager, and finally as publisher. The *Merc* alone accounted for fully half the company's increase in classified revenue that year; for over twenty years it ranked among the top five papers in the country in total full-run ad lineage. This was not surprising, given the rapid growth of Silicon Valley and the *Merc's* position there as the only game in town.

The *Mercury News*, like newspapers across the country, operated, for all practical purposes, as a monopoly, if not in disseminating the news (there was still peripheral competition) than in being the only meaningful destination for every home buyer and seller, every employer and applicant. With the conversion from hot type to cold, it took fewer people less time to put out a newspaper. And with the death of so many afternoon papers, the survivors grew richer. And as they grew richer, they became more attractive to investors seeking a reliably rising quarterly return. Newspaper companies, eager for that infusion of cash, began going public.

But that seemingly enviable absence of competition would come at a profound, if still unseen, cost: newspapers, which once fought for every story and ad, now had no one

had to do anything other than publish the paper." Exacerbating this sense of financial entitlement was the knowledge that newspapers could charge as much as they liked, knowing advertisers both big and small could do nothing about it. "They were," Zollman says, "rapacious."

Such was the state of the newspaper business when Tony Ridder became the first Ridder to run a company in which his family had always been perceived as the junior partner. His concern about electronic classifieds appeared premature—the numbers offered nothing but assurance. All the numbers, save one. In 1995, Knight Ridder's newspaper profit margin fell by 4 percent, to a still enviable 12.5 percent. The drop was attributed to the losses sustained by the *Detroit Free Press*, which was in the midst of a protracted strike.

Still, that number was unsettling for anyone worried about upsetting shareholders. Disappointment could turn to anger, which, in turn, could fuel a hostile takeover, to which Knight Ridder, with its single-tier stock structure, was particularly vulnerable. Ridder was determined to protect his company in the way he knew best: by increasing revenues and doubling the value of the stock. His employees may not have thought of him as a newspaperman, certainly not one like Jim Batten. But in that regard they were wrong.

Ridder was about to double down on his family's business.



Fear factor Tony Ridder was derided for being more interested in Knight Ridder's stock price than its journalism, but when he told a group of editors that "electronic classifieds" were what kept him up at night, he put his finger on the very issue that would torpedo newspapers, and not only his.

to push against and so grew complacent. Nowhere was the growing arrogance more apparent, in fact, than in the classified departments, where people did not even talk about selling classified ads, as they might when they spoke of retail. Instead, the sales staff sat at telephones and took classifieds.

"It was a passive thing," says Peter M. Zollman, a founder of AIM Group, a consultant on classified advertising. "Nobody

MEANWHILE, AT THE *MERCURY NEWS*, BOB RYAN WAS undergoing an immersion course in the digital world for which his junior college code-writing course had not prepared him. So much had changed since his semester at Foothill Junior College, which he had paid for on his own after his employer would not. Ryan, who had been running the *Merc's* foreign and national reports, was experiencing life

on the other side of the digital divide, which meant he was now the editor whom the print-side reporters told to get lost.

In January 1995, Mercury Center became the first news site in the nation to migrate to the web. The move liberated the site from the digital limitations and financial burdens of AOL. Access was initially free; but within several months the *Merc* began charging subscribers \$4.95 a month—a dollar if they took the print paper. This decision troubled Barry Parr. One advertiser had suggested to him that the *Merc* make its website free to everyone because the prospect of all those readers would lure advertisers. Parr ran the suggestion up the chain of command, and it was not well received: the *Merc* averaged a quarter of a billion dollars in annual revenues, and to the paper's leaders, giving away all that content would turn the *Merc* into a \$25 million business. Parr, who had already worked on digital startups, could offer no rebuttal, given that he was making the case for projected earnings, not the actual money flowing from all those readers (and advertisers) paying for the printed paper. He left soon after, for yet another startup, CNET, whose detailed technology coverage would, in time, come at the *Merc's* expense.

No longer bound by the limits of AOL's Rainman software, Mercury Center now opened to a home page filled not with boxes but with headlines that, with a click, opened to stories. There were the now-familiar features: NewsHound, a digital "clipping service" in which readers could personalize the sorts of stories they wanted delivered to their electronic inboxes; data search capacity; and Talent Scout, electronic want ads that featured résumé posting. The site updated news throughout the day and offered links to other web destinations, both local and national. And it had classified job ads through a searchable database called Career Mosaic. Advertisers signed on—IBM, Netcom, Coldwell Banker, and Del Monte, whose ad offered a hypertext cookbook.

Mercury Center was attracting users. The numbers, however, were modest—2,700 new web subscribers by late May 1995—as was revenue: \$120,000 that month, with \$19,000 from electronic classifieds.

By 1995, Ryan was beginning to see much the same pattern on the web that Bill Mitchell had seen with AOL: it was not the site's basic services (the content of the newspaper, and expanded listings) that excited readers enough to be willing to pay. Rather, it was the "premium" services, like the archives and the News Hound aggregator. Readers, it was becoming clearer, wanted quick access to particular sorts of information, and they did not want to labor to find it. Money was not the issue: a year earlier, Mitchell had reported that users regarded premium content—useful information unavailable elsewhere—as a bargain, a gift that came at relatively little cost.

Meanwhile, the site's staff was expanding, even as the newsroom was growing more crowded; in those days it felt, as one longtime editor put it, as if the paper was adding a section a week. So in December 1996, Mercury Center, which Bob Ingle had insisted be at the core of the newsroom, moved to new offices in downtown San Jose.

Ingle, too, was gone, promoted in January 1995 to corpo-

rate vice president for new media. The man who had been unable to rally his own newsroom around his electronic experiment was going to be the point man on Knight Ridder's digital expansion. The staff's resistance to Mercury Center aside, Ingle had for fourteen years run his territory in a manner of his choosing. He was about to discover how profoundly that was going to change, even with his lofty title.

HIS SUCCESSOR AS THE *MERC'S* EDITOR, JERRY CEPPOS, was a gentler soul who, as Ingle's longtime deputy, had watched the *Mercury News* boom as the paper's core story—Silicon Valley—drew advertisers, subscribers, and, inevitably, competitors. Much to his chagrin, the national press had discovered Silicon Valley, albeit slowly—*The New York Times* first mentioned the World Wide Web in February 1993. And while the *Merc* was still cited as the source for many technology stories, Ceppos didn't like watching the big players cutting in on his paper's turf. Finally, in February 1996, when *Time* ran a cover story featuring Netscape—"The Golden Geeks"—Ceppos stood before his growing newsroom—which would soon expand to 350, sixty on the business desk alone—and announced, in a rare poetic flourish, that the story of Silicon Valley was nothing less than Florence in the time of the Medicis.

Santa Clara County was being transformed, he said, and while other, bigger newspapers and magazines could dip in and out, no news organization but the *Merc*—and the Mercury Center—had the money, the staff, and the access to cover all the many ripples unleashed by the digital revolution. He was not speaking just of companies giving away Porsches at auctions. Rather it was the story of schools, immigrants—everyone whose lives were being shaped by all that wealth. It was a dizzying time to work at the *Mercury News*.

Bob Ryan, meanwhile, was experiencing life at Mercury Center, now that it had moved out of the newsroom, as a remote "skunk works" operation. "Most of our work was invisible to the newsroom and the newsroom didn't care about it," he says. That isolation was made clear in April 1995 when Timothy McVeigh bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people, nineteen of them children, one of whom was photographed in the arms of a firefighter. Donna Lovell, who had stayed on at Mercury Center, posted the photograph immediately to the website. The *Merc's* photo editor, however, wanted it removed, claiming the photograph for the next morning's paper. Ceppos sided with Lovell.

Ryan understood the resistance; he, too, had long operated on a newspaper's daily clock. But as he spent his days before a computer terminal on his web browser, he began measuring time on a far faster scale. He sensed that his readers, too, were growing impatient with waiting for news and information. "They expected things immediately," he says. So did he.

But the web's growing power was not limited to speed. Mercury Center's audience grew, though how much it was hard to say: the company claimed in its 1995 annual report that traffic had doubled, but did not provide numbers; it was

not until 1997 that it would report 1.2 million monthly visitors for Mercury Center. And Ryan had come to understand that numbers, both in traffic and in revenue, were flexible; it was not difficult, say, to claim a percentage of ad revenue for online "upsells."

Mercury Center's reputation was growing. In 1996, *Editor & Publisher* named Mercury Center the nation's best newspaper on the web. Ryan, and the entire news organization, would soon learn just how powerful a tool they had—for better or worse.

IN AUGUST 1996, *THE MERCURY NEWS* PUBLISHED THE FIRST of three stories on an alleged connection between the US-backed Nicaraguan contras and the devastation wrought by the crack trade on the inner city. Gary Webb's series, "Dark Alliance," charged that drug money was funding the insurgency. Much as Bob Ingle had envisioned in 1990, the publication of the series was a joint effort by the print and digital sides—Mercury Center posted documents, as well as audio recordings from wiretaps and hearings. The response was electric; the story became the subject of talk radio, and of every conspiracy theorist who believed that the government was secretly behind the crack trade. "You don't have to be *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post* to bust a national story anymore," Webb said. Traffic boomed—Ryan estimated a 15 percent boost in readership. There were days when over a million people visited the site. "For us, it has certainly answered the question: Is there anyone out there?"

But the early excitement soon gave way to growing suspicions about the story, not necessarily the facts but the extent to which Webb had extrapolated upon what he had learned. The same national press whose ranks the *Merc* believed it had joined began running stories rebutting Webb's charges, and suggesting, none too kindly, that the upstart *Merc* had overreached. At the paper, there was growing anger—not necessarily at Webb, but at the editors who had run a story whose core premise, on a closer reading, felt vastly oversold. Webb was reassigned; Ceppos, who'd been on medical leave, was compelled to address his restive staff and later write an explanatory public letter, backing away from the series.

Lost in the fallout and recriminations was how widely and quickly Mercury Center had spread the story. The experiment dismissed as "Bob Ingle's train set" had displayed a power unlike anyone at the paper had ever seen. No one was then using the word "viral" because it had never happened before.

IN 1995 AND 1996, KNIGHT RIDDER BEGAN TO JETTISON properties, among them its remaining cable television systems, as well as its Information Design Laboratory in Boulder, Colorado, a \$900,000 annual investment that in 1992 began developing an early version of a tablet newspaper. The laboratory, in the view of its director, Roger Fidler, had been a Jim Batten project, an enthusiasm that Tony Ridder—and Bob Ingle—did not share. Far larger, and noticeable to investors, was the decision to sell Knight Ridder Financial, the business

news service that was fighting with Reuters, Dow Jones, and, more recently, Bloomberg LP, to retain its share of the market. The service, which employed about 1,100 people, averaged about \$200 million in annual revenues. But its profits, Ridder told the *Times*, were modest. Wall Street greeted the news by boosting the value of Knight Ridder stock by \$3.38 a share. Ridder announced that the proceeds would go toward paying down debt, as well as further boosting the value of the stock with a buy-back program. The company would also buy more newspapers.

In 1988, *Forbes* had scolded Knight Ridder for relying too heavily on its core newspaper business. And in the years that followed the company had diversified. But with its purchases in 1997 of *The Kansas City Star*, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, and dailies in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and Belleville, Illinois, Knight Ridder was positioning itself as a "pure play" newspaper company, albeit one with a growing online presence. It sold its stake in Netscape, which was under assault by Microsoft.

And it was wary of proposals for new ventures not perceived as central to the business. In 1996, for instance, Jeff Skoll, who had briefly worked for Knight Ridder, approached Ingle about buying a stake in a startup for which he had become only the second employee. It was called eBay. Skoll had also taken the proposal to Times Mirror and, according to Adam Cohen's account in *The Perfect Store*, Skoll wanted to enhance his leverage. Ingle told me that he wanted Knight Ridder to buy a controlling stake in eBay, but that Ridder, not seeing how the online auction trade fit in the business of classified advertising, declined.

Mary Jean Connors, who, as vice president for human resources, was close to Ridder, does not dispute that decision. Knight Ridder, she told me, was often approached with investment opportunities, but lacked a venture capital firm's expertise in assessing such proposals—a quality it shared with so many news organizations that, in the years to come, would look back and cringe at acquisitions they made, and others they missed.

"There was no one who stood up and said if we invest in eBay life will be grand," she says. "We looked at a million things. And no one could say this is going to be the one. And we just couldn't spread ourselves. Could we have won at the roulette table that night? Maybe. But we didn't. You don't go back and say, if only...."

The decision, she went on, reflected a broader sense of how the company regarded itself. "We had the impediment of who we were. We had our kind of talent and our kind of investors," she said. "We weren't hiring the best engineers. We were hiring people who could do great work in journalism and great sales people. You can't change who you are."

5. Babel

Kathy Yates, whose early discomfort with Bob Ingle had evolved into friendship, joined him at Knight Ridder's digital division, and it was there, in 1997, that she first heard of a new book by a Harvard Business School professor that presented a sober and troubling assessment of the fate that awaited

companies under assault from what he called “disruptive technology.”

In *The Innovator’s Dilemma*, Clayton Christensen wrote of two technological forces, the more gentle of which “sustained” well-run companies. Ingle, in fact, had witnessed the power of “sustaining technology” as a young man at *The Miami Herald*, where the conversion from hot to cold type made producing a newspaper quicker and cheaper. The *Herald*, like newspapers across the country, absorbed that innovation in a way that streamlined the operation of a well-run company in a chain of successful newspapers.

But “disruptive technology” possessed an altogether different power, one that could unmoor the best-run companies. Disruptive technology was difficult to confront because it functioned in a profoundly counterintuitive way. Unlike cold type, for instance, it did not enhance a product whose market—advertisers and readers—was established, familiar, and reliably profitable. Instead, it created new products that initially held little appeal to that existing market, either because the market was already happy with what it had, or because it was not ready for that innovation. In the 1980s, those newspaper companies that had experimented with electronic publishing discovered that their audiences still regarded the printed paper as the most efficient way to read and advertise.

It was a mistake, Christensen argued, to find fault with established companies not drawn to small, unprofitable corners of the market. Those companies had succeeded because they had developed their own “laws of nature”—an almost intuitive sense of how to make decisions, spend money, and, most important, maintain a good and reliable relationship with their customers. But these were the very qualities, he argued, that rendered them so vulnerable to disruptive technology.

Christensen, a devout Mormon, was staking out a position that bordered on business heresy. In the face of disruptive technology, he wrote, the wise course was *not* to react to the demands of existing customers. It was imperative to *lower* revenue expectations for the products spun off by those new technologies. And it was essential to accept the inevitability of failure. If sustaining technology brought reassurance, disruptive technology sowed doubt.

Yates had been with Knight Ridder long enough to recognize how much Christensen’s case mirrored what had taken place at her company. Knight Ridder, under Jim Batten, had ended the Viewtron experiment because the market was judged too small and the cost too high. But now Christensen was presenting an argument suggesting that, in essence, the company had had it all wrong—that because it had lost so much money it could not appreciate that Viewtron did, in fact, serve a market, albeit a small one that could, over time, develop into a far larger one, once the technology became cheaper, accessible, and efficient. Once the personal computer with a high-speed modem became a household

fixture, the newspaper would cease being the best way to read, and more importantly, to search for jobs, employees, cars, and homes. *That* was the moment of disruption. And when it occurred, the companies that had been cultivating their shares of the emerging markets found themselves no longer at the periphery, but, like eBay, in a position to dominate a market that, not so long before, did not appear to exist.

As if by chance, Ingle had in 1990 come upon the very corrective in Mercury Center that Christensen would prescribe seven years later—a small, inexpensive laboratory for trying out those disruptive technologies, a place where modest successes could be celebrated and built upon, a “skunk works” operation that the company could keep running as it waited to see whether the new markets might emerge, or existing ones catch up.

But as it was with Charlene Li’s technology fair, and with Roger Fidler’s innovation lab, Knight Ridder had shown itself to be uncomfortable with failure—failure as defined by little money to show for the effort. After she left Knight

Ridder, Li, who believed the company would one day be “eaten alive,” eventually founded her own firm, consulting companies on adapting to disruptive technology.

Knight Ridder passed on a controlling stake in eBay because it didn’t fit with KR’s sense of itself as a newspaper company.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1997, BOB INGLE had assumed the role of the news business’s Jeremiah. At the Newspaper Association of America’s new-media conference in San Francisco, he rose to offer his dark prediction of the fate

that awaited all those unwilling to change.

“We think we’re an institution—the last bastion against greed and corruption and government inefficiency,” he thundered. “We are our own worst enemies. We have forgotten how to compete, and we better learn damn fast because we’re on Internet time.”

Newspapers were hesitating to adapt, convinced that somehow they could survive by doing things as they always had, he continued. But that meant a slow death, because soon enough the monopoly on classified advertising was going to end, and when it did the money that paid for all the journalism that made publishers and editors so proud was going to evaporate.

For all his worry about the next threat, Ingle believed he had identified his enemy, and it was not a startup, even though small firms were freer to throw their modest resources behind an innovation, if only because they had so much less to lose. The threat he saw was not the free electronic classified listings that Craig Newmark started running, part time, from his San Francisco apartment in 1995. Nor was it BackRub, a search engine being developed by two Stanford graduate students, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, who in 1997 would rename it Google.

The threat was not from below, as Ingle saw it, but from above, from the biggest player in the digital game, Microsoft.

In 1996, Microsoft had launched Sidewalk, a network of city guides that, Ingle told the NAA gathering, would eat into markets that newspaper websites had made their own.

He was not alone in that fear. In 1995, Knight Ridder had joined with the leading news organizations in the country—The New York Times Company, Tribune Company, and The Washington Post Company among them—in an alliance against the online threat called New Century Network. By 1997, however, the group was falling apart, riven by conflicting agendas. Ingle remained convinced that Microsoft had to be stopped, or at least stalled. If New Century Network could not find a way to work together, he reasoned, Knight Ridder would go it alone.

As it happened, Kathy Yates had come up with a plan to leverage the chain's reach into a potential market for national advertising. The project would involve all of Knight Ridder's papers. Microsoft may have had the national reach. But each Knight Ridder paper, the thinking went, knew—and, in effect, owned—its town.

"Our mission was to try to create a defensive property to help protect the core of the newspapers," Yates would later say. "Real Cities was about a way to standardize what we were doing on the web."

The Real Cities network would be Knight Ridder's attempt to push back in a broad and ambitious way against the forces of disruption—forces that, as Ingle and Yates would soon discover, could turn smart and devoted people against each other.

DAVID DEMILO ARRIVED AT KNIGHT RIDDER DIGITAL IN 1997, recruited by Chris Jennewein to build something altogether alien at the company—a technological development unit that would operate not in the chaotic "daily miracle" of a newsroom, but in accordance with the strict rules of order that, the jeans-and-sneakers dress code aside, prevailed in the digital world.

Jennewein, who had helped build the early version of Mercury Center, had been dispatched by Ingle to those Knight Ridder newspapers that still needed to build websites—the first step in creating the new Real Cities network. DeMilo, who had worked on his college paper at Harvard and who had interned at the *Herald* when Ingle was still there—and who remembered what terrific holiday parties he threw—had been at Primedia, where he helped build booksonline.com, the firm's first e-commerce site.

He was an outlier among his new colleagues. DeMilo liked newspapers, but had been away from them long enough to recognize that the qualities that made newspaper people most proud were regarded as secondary in the digital world. Chief among them was content. Newspaper people, he heard time and again, insisted that *content was king*. But in DeMilo's world, content was not king. The platform was king. It was king because the platform reflected not the sensibilities of the people who created the content, but rather the people who used it. If it worked for them, they would use it.

Knight Ridder's technology staff was a collection of consultants, many still in their twenties. DeMilo's job was to

create an organization that could standardize all the company's websites so that information could be streamed into databases in a way that made them searchable; no national advertiser, the reasoning went, would be interested in a network in which each ad had to be formatted to fit an array of sites. This meant imposing clear and immutable lines from inception to launch but which, in the eyes of DeMilo's new colleagues, sapped the creative process of its spontaneity. But last-minute changes of mind and direction were difficult to accomplish in the intricate, numerical language in which DeMilo worked: code.

Code, in DeMilo's eyes, possessed an elegance that could bring digital ideas to life on a screen. He tried to explain how in the language of code, a decision on, say, a color or format could not be changed without additional costs and delays. DeMilo could only work within the parameters of the prevailing technology—JavaScript was still relatively primitive; XML did not yet exist—limitations that his colleagues could not seem to fathom: "They would say, 'You're being stubborn.'"

Being accused of stubbornness, however, was nothing compared to the resistance that Ingle and Yates had been encountering almost from the moment they announced their plan. Because by launching Real Cities they had committed the sin second only to compromising Knight Ridder's stock value: they had angered the publishers.

KNIGHT RIDDER WAS A FEDERATION IN WHICH EACH OF its newspapers operated as its publisher saw fit, so long as the paper met the company's revenue goals. The publishers of the largest papers—in Philadelphia, Miami, and San Jose—wielded considerable power, and had come to take themselves, and their perquisites, seriously. "They were our clients and they wanted their independence, and we wanted to take that away from them," says Mark Weinberg, an editor who worked on Real Cities. "You could have predicted the corporate resistance from the get-go."

Perhaps, he reasoned, seduction might help. Weinberg organized "Fellows Tours," which brought the publishers and their top executives to Silicon Valley to behold a digital future that, Weinberg believed, "was not real to them."

He prepared briefing books that he suspected the "fellows" did not read. No matter. The key was the site visits to, among others, 3Com, Excite, and Netscape, which had been so instrumental in Mercury Center's migration from AOL to the web. There they heard the story of Netscape's rapid rise from start-up to multimillion-dollar IPO. Weinberg would later recall one publisher, known for still dictating his e-mails, coming away saying, "I've been somewhere. I can't tell you exactly what I've seen, but I can tell you it's going to change our future."

Meanwhile, Kathy Yates was working on a different level of persuasion—less the glamour and more the looming threat: she invited a business school professor to present a case study on the power of disruptive technology. The case involved *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which had for decades been the repository, it seemed, of all known fact. That is, until Microsoft began bundling Encarta into its office suite

programs. In the course of six years, *Britannica* went from record earnings to bankruptcy.

But if the publishers were dazzled by what they had seen on their high tech tours, they did not, in Yates's view, appreciate the lessons of what befell *Britannica*. The encyclopedia, they told her, was a part of the book business. They published newspapers.

difficult to keep people from leaving for new ventures that promised terrific salaries and stock options, too. Donna Lovell, who had been among the pioneers on the Mercury Center staff, left for AltaVista. "We were all going to get rich," she says. In 1998, Ridder moved the chain's corporate headquarters from Miami to San Jose, an acknowledgment of where Knight Ridder had staked its future.



The new thing Real Cities, Knight Ridder's nascent national network, took the company's reluctant publishers on tours of Silicon Valley companies, including Netscape, with its soda-can replica of the Golden Gate Bridge. "I've been somewhere," one publisher said. "It's going to change our future."

"I got to the point where I could imagine a world without newspapers," she later said. "And they could not."

THE ONE PUBLISHER WHO NEEDED NO CRASH COURSE ON the growing force of the digital revolution was Jay Harris. He had been publisher of the *Mercury News* since 1994, and, in the best Knight Ridder tradition of selecting executives with newsroom credentials, had been a national correspondent for Gannett and editor of the *Philadelphia Daily News*. In 1998, the *Merc* posted revenues of \$288 million. Mercury Center, which had dropped its access fees that May, was attracting 1.2 million monthly unique visitors and was working to make itself more attractive to advertisers with a database of registered users, expanded online classifieds, and plans for a separate tech site, *siliconvalley.com*. The paper was also preparing to add a Vietnamese-language edition to go along with the Spanish-language edition it had launched two years earlier. Harris recognized that while the revenues from the new venture would be modest, the edition could establish the *Merc* as the paper of choice for a growing segment of what remained a booming and ever wealthier population in Santa Clara County.

The prospect of great and sudden wealth was being felt ever more in his newsroom, where editors were finding it

Yet Harris was beginning to see that all that money did not necessarily translate into more business for his newspaper. "We were doing well and the rocket was going further and further up," he says. "In the good years our operating profit was in the low 30 percent. In the bad years it was 23 percent. It was good but it was less good."

But now when Harris called on his biggest advertisers, he was hearing a troubling message: "You don't deliver as effectively and productively as you once did." Harris had competitors. One, *Monster.com*, an online job listing launched in 1994 from an office over a Chinese restaurant in Framingham, Massachusetts, had become, in the eyes of some of Harris's most reliable clients, an attractive alternative. "Places like Netscape or Cisco were beginning to doubt the value and the effectiveness of print advertising as compared to what they could do on the web and through the occasional job fair," he says. "As I made these visits, I knew things were changing. At first I didn't see it."

Yet, the corporation's solutions—Real Cities, as well as newly formed joint classified ventures with other newspaper companies—held no appeal for the powerful Knight Ridder publishers long accustomed to presiding over their own domains. "Corporate would want the *Mercury News* to take group sales people to meet with *Mercury News* clients.

And there was resistance to that," Harris says. "Tell me again why I'm supposed to do that? Our job was to work at those companies, the newspapers, to make them strong. Jay Harris ran San Jose. And among the big papers there was sort of this distance."

He was not alone among his peers in feeling the unwanted pressure of conforming to corporate wishes. "The big publishers got together, not because we were in revolt. But our interests were different than those in Macon, Georgia," Harris says. They gathered in Charlotte to talk about strategies, about their needs, their plans. "None of us felt we needed to get anybody's permission to talk about what worked best for large newspapers."

Their boss was not pleased.

"There was a sense that we had a secret meeting," Harris says, "but that wasn't true. Tony called me one day and he was really pissed. From his perspective we were doing something clandestine."

But from Harris's perspective, the publishers' job was to run their individual newspapers. Bob Ingle was asking them to join together in an enterprise whose payoff seemed questionable.

BY 1999, NINE YEARS HAD ELAPSED since Ingle had written his "report," which set in motion his newspaper's answer to the "failure" of Viewtron. He had been confident that he had identified his enemy in Microsoft. But now he was not so sure; Microsoft sold the Sidewalks project to CitySearch in 1999. Meanwhile, companies that few had heard of two years earlier were eating into his business. Ingle, never one to consult, did what he had always done: he withdrew into himself. "He stopped listening," Yates recalls, "to concentrate on where the next threat's coming from."

Meanwhile, DeMilo and his team were writing the code for the verticals that would support Real Cities. Ken Doctor and others on the editorial side of the project were working to devise content that would mesh with those ads, only to be told that it was a business-side decision, and new hires in some areas would have to be authorized by Tony Ridder.

Beleaguered as he was, Ingle could appreciate the bind in which Ridder found himself. His company was enjoying a prosperous 1999: revenue was over \$3 billion, and the profit margin stood at 19 percent, three percent higher than in 1998. But advertising revenue had dipped; a sustained falloff could have serious implications. Ridder had thrown in with Ingle and Yates; digital revenues, though up 75 percent, were still a relatively modest \$31 million. Yet although he may have been angry with the publishers about the Charlotte meeting, Ingle sensed that Ridder was reluctant to battle them on his behalf. "As long as they were delivering the bottom line, that's what mattered," Ingle said.

"The person in charge of policing this was Tony Ridder and he just wouldn't do it. He'd say, 'You just tell them what you want and I'll see they do it.' But that didn't happen."

That left Ingle and Yates to push the publishers on their own, and though the Real Cities project was moving ahead, the resistance to it had not abated. In fact, it had only grown more personal. "We were all strong-willed people," Harris says. "No one was going to get rolled."

IT WAS AS IF THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO RAN KNIGHT RIDDER had been handed a script from *The Innovator's Dilemma* and asked to play the roles of well-intentioned executives trying to find their way in the face of a disruption they were only beginning to understand. The publishers in late 1998 were looking for someone to blame for the unhappy position in which they found themselves, being pushed to surrender their autonomy to support a group project with which they did not necessarily agree. The choice was logical and apparent. Kathy Yates would later recall the meeting with the publishers when one rose and, reflecting the resentment simmering over Ingle's manner, said, "Bob never returns my phone calls."

He did not leave it there. "Raise your hands," he went on, "if Bob doesn't return your phone calls."

Ingle tried to assure them that he was not unresponsive. But he had lost them.

It took Tony Ridder a bit longer to decide that Ingle had outlived his usefulness. It came on the eve of a meeting of the corporate board. Ingle had just begun his slideshow presentation when members of the corporate staff began peppering him with questions

and criticism. The following morning Yates ran into Ridder in a coffee shop. "You," he said. "I want to see you in my office in ten minutes."

The day before, Yates had left the briefing convinced that she and Ingle had lost the chairman's confidence. She was half right. Now, Ridder told her, Ingle was out as head of Knight Ridder Digital. She was in charge. Real Cities relaunched the next September. But by then she too would be gone.

"We were all being human," says Jay Harris. "There was insecurity. There was defensiveness. As things went along people started to look over each other's shoulders."

"We were starting to wear jeans and open collar shirts on Fridays," he adds, as if conforming to the Silicon Valley dress code somehow made them part of the forces of disruption. "That's the part we understood."

Epilogue

In the early winter of 2000, Dan Finnigan, whom Tony Ridder had hired to replace Kathy Yates, was listening as representatives of Goldman Sachs discussed plans for splitting Knight Ridder's digital division into a separate company and taking it public. Finnigan, who had worked on business development at the *Los Angeles Times* and then at *Smartpages.com*,

had been hired for this moment. At his interview, Ridder had asked him for his thoughts about an IPO of the digital operation. "That was his vision," Finnigan would later say. "That was his goal."

He, too, had encountered the same sort of resistance from the publishers that had doomed Bob Ingle, especially on the question of joining with the Tribune Company in a recruitment site called *CareerBuilder.com*. The publishers argued that the site would eat into their local listings. Finnigan explained that either they were going to cannibalize their own businesses or someone else would. The publishers were not pleased. But by 2000, *CareerBuilder* had been launched and the IPO had already gone public, and now Finnigan listened as the bankers from Goldman offered their assessment of the new company's value.

When he heard the number—\$547 million—Finnigan snickered. "That," he recalls thinking, "is so overvalued." In fact, in 2000 Knight Ridder would report losses of \$46 million from its digital operations—\$22 million more than it had lost in 1999. No matter that monthly page views had increased to 154 million, from 104 million. Though revenues were up, they were being eclipsed by rising operating costs. The new company was not even operational and yet, like so many other Silicon Valley ventures, the mere suggestion of a startup was enough to create value where nothing yet existed. "Everybody around sensed this bubble is getting out of hand."

That April tech stocks cratered, and with that, the value of Knight Ridder Digital's IPO plummeted. Still, Finnigan says, Tony Ridder held fast to the idea of spinning off the new company. Finnigan left in 2002 for Yahoo, leaving Ridder and his still restive publishers to sort out their future.

In the years to come, faced with declining revenues, especially in classifieds—which would fall across the industry by 71 percent between 2000 and 2010, almost twice as much as the rates for retail and national advertising—Tony Ridder found himself ever more under fire from his employees, as he ordered round after round of cost cutting. Harris quit in March 2001, rather than make the cuts Ridder demanded. *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Knight Ridder publishers were being offered handsome bonuses for cost cutting, a charge the company denied. Ridder's employees began calling him Darth Ridder.

Yet Harris, of all people, felt a certain sympathy for his former boss. He recognized that Ridder had grown up in a culture that followed a simple business formula: "Take care of the top line and the bottom line will take care of itself." The top line meant overhead, which meant employees' salaries and benefits. Absent a source of revenue to make up for that dwindling share of the classified ads, Ridder was left with no choice but to cut, or risk alienating the shareholders who owned so much of his company.

By 2005, however, all the cost cutting was still not enough to satisfy the largest stakeholder, Bruce Sherman. Together with other top institutional investors, Sherman demanded changes in the way the company was run. Sherman, it soon became clear, was positioning himself to gain control of the board and with it, force a sale.

In March 2006, McClatchy bought Knight Ridder for \$4.5

billion. Five months later the new owners divested themselves of several large properties, among them the *Mercury News*, which it sold to Dean Singleton's MediaNews Group, along with the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and two smaller California papers, for \$1 billion.

The Mercury News's profit margin had by then fallen to nine percent. Sunday circulation, which stood at 327,000 in 2000, had fallen by 15 percent. Revenue had dropped from \$341 million in 2000 to an estimated \$235 million, with \$22 million in profits, a spiral exacerbated by the precipitous drop in classified advertising that had so worried Kathy Yates twelve years earlier. Job listings, which had helped pay for all the ambitious journalism and experimentation the *Merc* could afford to do, had suffered the most significant drop—from \$118 million in 2000 to \$18 million. Four months after the sale to Singleton, the *Mercury News* announced it was laying off another 101 people, forty of them from the newsroom.

THE SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS IS NOW A SOLID, IF THIN, newspaper with a website filled with all sorts of features and stories from its Bay Area sister papers. It does not hurt for content. But there is no mistaking the *Merc* now for what it was at the top of its game. Its display pages are filled with fine and sometimes lively original content. But inside, wire copy fills a good deal of space, the tell-tale sign of a shrunken operation.

I found reading the *Merc* a haunting experience: I could not see it as it is now without recalling what it was like when it was admired and prosperous. I had come to San Jose to make sense of what happened to this paper, and through it, what happened to so many other newspapers whose fortunes had been undone in the face of the great technological disruption. In time I grew ever more dissatisfied with hearing of the inevitability of that swift and troubling decline. Much as I admired Bob Ryan's biblical poetry, I still wondered whether, in fact, all this had been "written." The *Mercury News* and Knight Ridder had been on the vanguard of adapting to change. And in the end, their efforts did them no good.

If the demise of the chain and the decline of the paper were not the results of too little effort, did that mean no effort could have succeeded?

Or had all that effort been misguided?

As he was cleaning out his office, Bill Mitchell, who has since moved to the Poynter Institute, happened upon some old memos and files from the early days at Mercury Center. He had not seen them in years, and wondered if I might want to take a look.

They were a revelation. The documents, intended as presentations to Knight Ridder executives, described a period when the Mercury Center experiment drew minimal interest and earnings. Readers and advertisers, they reported, seemed curious about online content, but were not really sure of how it might work for them. The monthly signups were still being measured in the hundreds.

But the pattern that had begun to emerge in 1994, and continued into 1995 and beyond, provided tantalizing clues that went unheeded: here was data suggesting, strongly, that

the site's basic content—the full text of the day's paper, the 200 or so extra stories that had not made it into print, the online versions of print ads, even the billboard chats—did not excite users nearly as much as the "premium content," which came at an additional cost: the archives, and the NewsHound clipping service, which scanned for content beyond the *Merc* by subject. Left unanswered was how to make basic services feel like the premium services, for which users had shown a willingness to pay.

Ingle had devised Mercury Center as a laboratory. And here was data pointing to a daring hypotheses: if we stop thinking of a newspaper—and a website as the extension of the newspaper—solely as a repository of information that can appeal to *everyone*, then we are no longer restricted to a business model that relies overwhelmingly on a single source of revenue (advertising) predicated on appealing to the largest number of people. What if, in addition to a product for everyone, we charged for, say, specific categories of information? What if we did not try to replicate online the business that existed in print? What if we stopped thinking like newspaper people—dedicated to preserving a business whose core is an advertising-dominated paper? What if we adapted to the growing disruption by slicing off parts of what we make available, at no cost to everybody, and instead enhance and sell it? What if we began thinking of our business, our relationship with our customers, the allocation of resources in an altogether new way and, like startups, we began developing new markets, rather than try to patch together a semblance of the big market the technology was undoing?

The early results from the Mercury Center suggested that users so *valued* those premium features that they were willing to pay. So why stop there?

Bear in mind that charging for access was already the precedent: users had paid \$9.95 a month for access via AOL and then \$4.95 a month for web access. The *Merc* dropped the fees in the hope of generating more traffic, and with it, more advertising, even though the revenues from those online ads were a seventh of their print counterparts. The decision not to charge for content reflected an electronic version of the business model built on amassing the largest possible audience, not on cultivating niches.

And yet, the niches were there for all to see. By the late 1990s, Chris Jennewein told me, the *Mercury News* was finding audiences well beyond its circulation area—online readers as far away as India eager for the *Merc*'s tech news. And while Knight Ridder began trying to build audiences for its NASCAR coverage in Charlotte and the auto industry in Detroit, it was reluctant to dedicate the people necessary to create the content for those niche markets. "Our newspaper roots," he wrote to me, "held us back."

The Wall Street Journal, the reasoning across the business went, may have decided to charge for content. But the *Journal* was regarded as a niche publication with a targeted audience and so bore no resemblance to the general interest newspaper. That was true. But what, other than habit and tradition, was stopping the omnibus newspaper from abandoning its traditional view of itself and becoming something new: a print and online publication that combined

content for everyone—thereby meeting its public service and advertising imperatives—and that *also* provided "premium" content for those new markets that valued it.

The prospect of altering the nature of the work brought to mind the great hue and cry of the 1970s when *The New York Times*, beset by profound money woes, introduced its Home, Living, and Weekend sections. Critics dismissed the "having" sections as a diminution of the *Times*'s brand and legacy. The sections were editorial vehicles against which targeted ads could be sold. They helped save the paper. So why not augment the sales potential by selling some of the content, too, to niche markets?

In his "skunk works" operation in Silicon Valley, Bob Ingle and his small team had stumbled upon something intriguing.

And then they stopped. Or rather, they tacked away from small and, as newspapers have always done, went for the big. Real Cities did not doom Knight Ridder. But the thinking behind it—an operation with the reach and scale to defend the core business from the onslaught of a single great and powerful enemy—reflected not the best discoveries made at Mercury Center, but the sensibilities of an industry that could not quite abandon the belief that the path to salvation lay in replacing that core revenue stream with one that looked remarkably similar to what was being lost.

The problem with Real Cities was not that it was radical. Mercury Center was the radical move. It was not built to make money in a hurry. It was created to try things out, to see what might one day make money, and what would fail. Archives and NewsHound were just a beginning. *Not* of inevitable success, but of an ongoing experiment.

Disruptive technology is only half the story of what happened to newspapers. There is also the response. The disruption opened the path to change, and not just for small companies unburdened by legacies of success. The change could also come for those older newspaper companies willing to accept that what was happening was not so much an existential crisis in journalism as it was a catastrophic assault on the most prosaic aspect of the newspaper business: the classifieds. Tough to do in any circumstances. Even tougher at a time when things feel as if they are going better than ever.

There was no better time to produce journalism and make a profit for newspapers than in the period journalists like to think of as the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate era, and which their colleagues on the business side might prefer thinking of as the Era of the One-Newspaper Town.

Mary Jean Connors of Knight Ridder, reflecting the sensibilities of so many people who insisted that, in the end, they were newspaper people, had told me, "You cannot change who you are."

It is a noble sentiment, reflecting the diminished glory of a noble enterprise.

But it is not written. **CJR**

MICHAEL SHAPIRO, a contributing editor to CJR, teaches at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism. He worked at newspapers in New Jersey and Chicago for five years before becoming a magazine and book writer. This piece is available for download via Kindle and Kindle apps, on your iPhone, iPad, BlackBerry, and Android devices, as well as on your computer.

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The Reporter's Voice

Since 1961, when CJR was born, journalism has undergone all manner of seismic shifts, from hot type to wireless transmission, satellites to social media, corporate control to 'here comes everybody.' The one constant, however—the thing that will always be the foundation for journalism's most important work—is great reporting. In the following thirty-two pages, we hear some of today's most accomplished reporters talk about what they do, how they do it, and why.

ANDREA BRUCE
STANLEY NELSON
KEN WARD JR.
ANTHONY SHADID
DANA PRIEST
ISABEL WILKERSON
BEN SMITH
ALAN SCHWARZ

Illustrations by Lyndon Hayes

A Different Life

Andrea Bruce was a community journalist in Iraq

Andrea Bruce is a freelance photojournalist, currently based in Afghanistan, whose powerful documentary work attempts to connect people across geography and culture. In 2010, she left The Washington Post, where she had spent eight years as a staff photographer. During that period, she focused on the war in Iraq, and specifically on documenting the lives of ordinary Iraqis and US soldiers. She was one of the few Western photographers who kept going back to Iraq after 2004, when the country devolved into a brutal civil war and the risks to journalists became nearly impossible to justify. She also wrote a weekly column for the Post called "Unseen Iraq." She has been named Photographer of the Year four times by the White House News Photographers Association, won the prestigious John Faber award for best photographic reporting from abroad from the Overseas Press Club, and was a 2011 recipient of the Alicia Patterson Foundation Fellowship. **Michael Kamber** interviewed Bruce in Baghdad in 2010.



Community Journalism

In my last semester of my senior year in college I took a photo class for fun, and fell in love with it and became a photographer. But my dream was never to be a war photographer. I wanted to be a community journalist. I guess there is a whole generation of us photographers who probably didn't really think we would become war photographers until September 11. That's how I started. I didn't really think that it would be something I would want to do until I realized that you need community journalists in Afghanistan and Iraq almost more than you need them in the States.

There is a story about an Iraqi prostitute that I worked on for almost a year. I interviewed almost thirty prostitutes before I found someone who was willing to talk to me. But the person I ended up following, her name is Halla, she got it. She was pretty much like, "My life sucks and I shouldn't have to sleep with men to feed my children and so yeah, you can take pictures and show everyone exactly what is going on." She basically became my best friend here. I'd hang out with her in between all the car bombs, in between all the embeds and violence. I would always go back to her thinking she is really what told the story to me of 2004 and Iraq. And she told it from a woman's perspective and this war is so told by men and through men. Eventually she would just ask her customers straight up. It was very casual, they would come to her door and her children would be playing

in the living room, and I'd be there, and the guys would be like, "No, I'm not going to let her photograph us." Because I knew, that's the one picture you had to get, to actually show why prostitution is horrible. And so one day a young client of hers came to the door and he said he didn't care if I took pictures and so I took pictures for as long as I could handle it personally.

Waiting for the Booms

I remember just driving around, waiting for the booms to happen, looking on the horizon for the smoke, and then just driving in that direction until we found it, then it happening somewhere else, like half an hour later. And then going from the bombing scene to the hospitals, then to the morgue, and then like this almost Groundhog Day-like coverage of the bombings.

Fireights are scary, but it's the IEDs that really kill you. It's that suffocating feeling of being inside any kind of vehicle. I even wore my iPod I think for one year straight when I was in a Humvee because I couldn't take it. In 2006 and 2007 it was just all the time, and you just realize that there is nothing you can do. It doesn't matter how fast you can run or how well you can see or even if you try to figure out like, well, if I'm in the first Humvee or the second Humvee or maybe the third, which one would be the least likely to be actually hit? You just have to realize that it's all a gamble, then you just sit there and you think, why am I doing this? And you hope that what we do actually gets seen and you hope that it actually does some good.

Sometimes I think that I totally failed. Because I don't

MICHAEL KAMBER is a contract photojournalist and writer for The New York Times. He has chronicled many of the world's major conflicts over the last decade, from Iraq and Afghanistan to Somalia and Sudan, with his camera and his pen. His interview with Bruce is part of his forthcoming book, the working title of which is *Uncensored: A Photojournalists' Oral History of the Iraq War*. It is due out in 2012 from the University of Texas Press.



The other war Halla, who turned to prostitution to feed her kids, became Bruce's best friend in Iraq.

think any of the pictures I have ever taken have adequately shown all of that.

Some of the military would say, "Oh, you just want these pictures because you want to sell newspapers." I'm like, "Do you know how many subscriptions were cancelled because of any photo that we ran that was even close to something like that?" Even my own mother would say, "I know this is happening but to be honest, I don't want to see it." You go home and you hit your head against the wall and you don't know why you do this, but then that's when you come back because you know that we're probably some of the only eyes on this thing.

A Very Different Life

There's a large toll it takes on all of us. After coming here in 2003, I got divorced at the end of 2004. I was just here the whole time. And I changed so much. I think it's hard for me to be in the United States. Not that I dislike the United States, because I actually have a lot of pride still in my country. I find that it's hard to be completely social. It just feels

a little harder to fit in. Sometimes I get anxious. Sometimes I get bored. Sometimes I am just kind of numb. Sometimes I lose patience. In grocery store lines or with TV shows, or random things. It's just not important or interesting to me on some level. I put everything I owned in two suitcases, everything else is in storage or sold, and I left the States. I don't really live anywhere now. I had a house and a fenced-in yard and two dogs and a wonderful husband who is a great guy—he's a schoolteacher. He had a very different life. When I started leaving, it kind of makes sense, he kind of felt like I abandoned him. I started to divide my life into two different realms. Like, I have a bulletproof vest, and I travel with \$10,000 in my sock and, and I wear an *abaya* half the time and my helmet the other half the time, like some sort of deranged superhero or something. And then in the other life I am this suburban housewife. Things like doing the bills, all those things, became—it's just that the two lives didn't fit anymore and eventually neither did my husband. So I just think I slowly—he felt that I just wasn't there anymore. He told me that I abandoned him.

I think things happen for that time in your life and that

was the right thing for me to do at that time in my life, and this is the right thing for me to do at this time in my life. I still do think that what we do is important. This seems probably very naïve, but I love trying to bring out people's personality in pictures and, again, I feel like I fail every time because people can be so intricate and weird and cool. So I'm like, "Oh, I have to come back and I have to do it better next time." And so you become even more obsessed and you think, "Maybe this time I'll get it, maybe this time I'll take the definitive photo of the Iraq War that'll get people to pay

We're the only women on the front lines of any war. I've had to prove myself to be hardcore, that I can do it.

attention like they did in Vietnam." I always wonder what would that photo be? This story—more than Vietnam—is so complex and different and it goes through stages, and our relationship with the military is weird and the war itself is more removed than it was in Vietnam. Now, soldiers can fire bombs at people from so far away that it's almost not personal in many ways. I guess the definitive photo so far would be the pictures soldiers took in Abu Ghraib. Because they show the reality that no one wants to really admit, which is that the relationship between the US and the Iraqis that they are supposed to be liberating was not quite so cheery.

He's Going to Fucking Kill Me

People are more scared of cameras here than they are of guns. I always wonder if the Americans' fear of journalism and journalists has actually kind of become the Iraqis' fear of journalists and cameras. I can't even carry a camera down the street these days without someone from the Iraqi military stopping me and harassing me. I showed up at a car bomb scene and it started getting so violent. They would push you, smack you. Someone took a piece of metal and swung it at me. I mean, I have been slapped. It's been insane. In 2005, there were several suicide bombings, one after another, one day in Karbala. We hear the bombs going off and myself and the reporter, of course, our initial reaction is to take pictures. I wasn't with the military. I was dressed in an *abaya*. That's just how I deal with it, and it was horrible—the bombing scene, blood everywhere and people being carted off in wheelbarrows with no legs and just like hell. I started taking pictures and before I knew it I was lifted off the ground and pinned against a wall, and there was one person and he was screaming at me and I remember the look in his eyes like, "He's going to kill me, he's going to just fucking kill me," because they are just so upset, they just saw tons of people reduced to nothing. And there was one person doing this and suddenly there were just fifty people doing that to me. That whole mob mentality. And luckily, I was with a reporter who

spoke Arabic and he told them, "She's my wife, she's my wife, you have to respect her." And slowly, that humanized me to some extent; so slowly, after a lot of talking, they let me go. That was probably the scariest thing that has ever happened to me—"You have a camera, you are the reason why this is happening, so we are attacking you."

It wasn't that way in 2003 or '04. I remember people wanting me to take pictures of car bombs because they were like, "This is freedom, this is what the Americans are bringing to Iraq!" And then, suddenly, the media became

the problem and I don't know how or why that happened exactly. After talking this mob down, the reporter and I walked away and it took another half hour to get my cameras back, which we did, which is unbelievable. There was some kind man in the crowd who helped us. And then we walked away and the guy who initially grabbed me found us again and I was like shaking at this point, I couldn't, I couldn't think. And he grabbed us and he was like, "I understand now, you're journalists, you must take pictures of this." And so he grabbed us and he took us around for an hour, and made me take pictures of every little piece of flesh. Or like a tooth. Or an eye. Or brains. Which is just as traumatic almost. I was like, "No one is going to use these pictures," and I am taking pictures of all the little tiny bits of body parts, under the supervision of this guy who almost killed me. It was just the craziest thing. To this day, I hear a bombing and I barely go out to cover it.

No Regrets

The military really is a guy culture. And they almost don't know what to do with us [women] when we embed with them. And you're stuck in like, supply closets, living by yourself. Or with some FOBS that are actually dangerous. I have had to live in tiny, half-fallen shacks. Far away from where all the men are, no sand bags, in the middle of nowhere. I mean, it's tough for women in Iraqi culture, too. I've had men slap me and tell me, "Woman, no." Actually, quite a few times I have had [American] guys on embeds flat out tell me, "You're a woman, you shouldn't be here." Female soldiers aren't allowed on the front lines. But we are. We're the only women on the front lines of any war. It's kind of incredible. And as a photographer, we're right there up front. I have had to earn the trust of people. I have to prove myself to be hardcore, that I can actually do it. I have probably more experience than most of the guys. But also, they won't respect you if you completely give up your femininity. So you can't be like completely butch. I am just kind of a shadow or something.

Some people look at us women and think that we have somewhat sad lifestyles. But I'm kinda like, "Are you kidding me?! This is the best life!" We see the most amazing things, we meet the most amazing people. I guess it's the whole marriage-baby thing that makes people think that, but I have no regrets.

Just Ask Questions

Stanley Nelson searches for truth in the past

Stanley Nelson is the editor of the weekly *Concordia Sentinel*, a 5,000-circulation newspaper in Ferriday, Louisiana. Nelson, head of a three-person newsroom, covers it all: the police, the courts, the drainage commission, politics, government, the rising this, the falling that, all of it playing out along the Mississippi River, sometimes in it, and sometimes across it, in Natchez, Mississippi. He writes a weekly column on the area's history. His readers learn about local hero Jim Bowie's famous sandbar fight in 1827, the tornado of 1840 that killed three hundred people, the cholera outbreak nine years later. Sometimes he writes about the area's notorious past—gambling, prostitution, corruption, and the historic Klan-infestation of law enforcement. He also reports and writes about three unsolved civil rights murders that took place down his way, two in 1964, one in 1967. He is a member of the Civil Rights Cold Case Project, whose goal is to dig out and reveal the truth behind these murders. In January, he named a living suspect in the 1964 Klan murder of Frank Morris in Ferriday, which has led to a grand jury investigation. To some, Stanley might seem like just a slow-talking, easygoing good ol' boy. He is, but that ain't all. Even after plowing through thousands of documents, interviewing scores of people and writing more than 150 stories about murders that are more than four decades old, Stanley has an incredible memory for detail, the ability to follow the trail of complicated and shadowy whodunit theories, and unlimited passion for exploration and discovery. Last May, he was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in local reporting "for his courageous and determined efforts to unravel a long forgotten Ku Klux Klan murder during the Civil Rights era." **Hank Klibanoff** interviewed Nelson in March.

A Moral Responsibility To Act

I was drawn to journalism in college because I loved writing. But when I started working for the Hanna family at their weekly newspapers in Louisiana, I found out pretty quickly that a lot more was expected of me. I had to take pictures and learn how to develop them in the darkroom. I'd answer the phones. I'd wait on customers at the front of the office, take their subscription money and give them a receipt. I'd sell ads if that needed to be done. Still, the early years offered me plenty of opportunities to focus on writing. How can you miss when you get a call about an old man who, thirty years after he carved the date and his initials

HANK KLIBANOFF is the James M. Cox Professor of Journalism at Emory University. His career spanned more than three decades, during which he was managing editor of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution and deputy managing editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer. In 2007, he won the Pulitzer Prize for history for *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*, which he co-authored with Gene Roberts.



into the shell of a terrapin, sees that same turtle crawling across his lawn again?

I came to see that while writing was fun, it was reporting that was the key to being a journalist. As a reporter, I was the eyes and ears of our readers. I covered a lot of criminal trials, dramatic ones, and it became clear readers were hungry for the coverage because we'd always sell out the newspaper. And if it weren't for you, the reporter, they'd never know what's going on. It requires you to get it right: the testimony, the cross examination, the meaning of it. You have to take good notes. I remember being accused by a school board member of having a tape recorder hidden in my pocket because he thought there was no way I could take notes that fast.

I am fortunate to have learned early that the key to reporting is having the willingness and sometimes the nerve to ask questions. But it's more than that. As a journalist, I saw that I had a duty and responsibility to ask questions. I recall sitting in the *Concordia Sentinel* newsroom one day when the district attorney came in. He had been summoned by Sam Hanna Sr., the newspaper owner and editor, who asked me to join them.

Sam Hanna was a hard-nosed reporter and a great political writer. He loved everything about the newspaper business. He loved the sound and the feel of the presses rolling and humming. He smoked a cigar and was just an energetic force, a true newspaperman. He would type on his Underwood and it would sound like a machine gun. Whenever he'd be away on an assignment and needed to call in his story, he'd always ask for me to take dictation. He'd write it in his head as I was typing and it was perfect.

That day the DA came in, Mr. Hanna was unhappy. There



Ghost Frank Morris, wearing the visor, in front of his shoe shop.

was a lot of vice in the area, and a lot of tolerance of it from law enforcement. Mr. Hanna had heard about a new business in town that plainly had prostitution operating in the back in broad daylight. Mr. Hanna wanted to know why the DA hadn't done anything about it. He wanted to know what he was going to do about it. He wanted to know when.

My eyes kind of bulged out because he was very bold about his questions and very firm in asking them. I think Mr. Hanna felt that once you knew about something that was wrong in the community, it would be morally irresponsible not to act on it. The lesson to me as a young reporter wasn't that it was the district attorney's duty to shut down houses of prostitution (though it was), but that it was the journalist's job to ask why he hadn't. I just remember thinking that if Mr. Hanna hadn't asked those questions, who else around here would have?

Stirring Up Old Hatreds

One day in 2007, when the FBI released a list of unsolved civil rights cases, one of the Hanna owners walked through the newsroom and said there was a Ferriday case on the list. Even though I grew up not far from here, I had never heard anything about it. Of course we're always wanting the local angle on a national story, so I began making some calls.

One call led to another and pretty soon I had some redacted FBI records gathered by the Southern Poverty Law Center. That, plus a story we had published in the paper in 1964, provided enough information to report that the FBI list included the 1964 arson of a shoe repair shop owned by Frank Morris, a black man, and that the FBI suspected it was race-related. Morris was inside when the fire was set. The fire consumed him and he ran from the building

in flames. He was burned horribly and lingered in agonizing pain for four days before dying.

After my first story or two, the granddaughter of Frank Morris, Rosa Morris Williams, called me from her home in Las Vegas. She had lived in Ferriday and was twelve when Morris's shop was torched. She had vivid memories of a delightful grandfather with a great sense of humor, and of the fear black people had of the Klan.

I just kept going, kept reporting and writing, about Morris and two other blacks killed by the Klan, Wharlest Jackson and Joseph Edwards. I felt about their cases the way Mr. Hanna felt about the prostitution: it would be morally irresponsible not to learn more, write more, and see who was accountable.

Investigative reporting is not something I ever thought I would do. It's not glamorous, especially when you're one of three people trying to cover the community and put out a weekly full-service newspaper. When you're looking into murders that took place forty and fifty years ago, you feel lucky just to learn whether the people mentioned in old documents are alive. Finding, reaching, and talking with them and others who may know about it is another challenge altogether.

The biggest hurdle is just finding out what happened. What precipitated the decision to kill Morris, Jackson, and Edwards, what planning took place? And how did the killers do it? This is one of those rare cases where the "why" of what they did—pure racial hatred—was easier to get than the "how."

I realized right away I could not do this by myself. I got great help from two Syracuse University law professors, Janis McDonald and Paula Johnson, who learned about the case from me when they were down here on something else. They dove in and did great work gathering records and finding people. I joined other journalists like Jerry Mitchell, David Ridgen, John Fleming, and Ben Greenberg to create the Civil Rights Cold Case Project under the Center for Investigative Reporting; those guys shared tips, documents, and ideas. I have gotten great interns from the journalism programs at LSU, the University of North Carolina, and the University of Alabama.

When you do something like this, you have a choice on how to present it to readers: you can do months and months of research without printing a word until you're finished, or you can do it the way I did it. I didn't know if this thing would ever have a conclusion, or if I'd find anybody alive who knew anything, so I kind of educated readers as I educated myself. I took it week by week and reported what I learned that week so that it would open people's eyes as it did mine and help jar memories and maybe compel people to come forward.

That's what happened. I wrote stories based on documents I was accumulating, and on calls I was making to old law enforcement guys and to family and friends of Morris, Jackson, and Edwards. I started getting calls. Some people didn't know anything about what happened in these murders, but told stories about the people involved, and gave me background and insights. A huge break came when Leland Boyd, after hearing about and reading my stories online, called me from Texas and started telling me about his daddy. I knew about Earcel Boyd Sr. and had records on his activity in the Klan and his role in the Silver Dollar Group, a violent Klan offshoot.

Then I spoke with Leland's brother Sonny, who was a teenager during that time and who had clear memories of what he saw and knew. It was amazing how open they were, and they had lots of wonderful knowledge, much of it eyewitness information from Klan meetings and Sunday fish fries with other Klan families, when the men would test explosives on tree stumps. They revealed the challenges of life inside their home, where their chores as teenagers included hauling bombs and bomb-making materials up to their attic. There were things about their daddy they hated and things they loved, and they were able to talk about it all. They were like rolling the calendar back to that time.

If I had just built up research and hadn't written anything for months at a time, Rosa Williams and Leland Boyd would not have picked up the phone to call me. Every article I wrote presented something new or clarified something. Doing it that way also put me in touch with my readers' attitudes,

I knew that solving that case was a long shot. But it would have been almost immoral to walk away from it.

both good and bad. The newspaper sold well every time I wrote those stories, and the website got busier. But I also encountered hostility. I'd have people tell me, "You're stirring up these old hatreds," or "Why're you doing this?" and "I think it's terrible you're doing this." I'm sure my owners, the Hannas, the widow and children of the late Sam Hanna Sr., heard the same thing, but they stood by me the whole way. They trusted me enough to let me go.

In a story that goes more than forty-five years back in time, you're dealing with a lot of older people, so the trail led to nursing homes, people on respirators, others in various stages of Alzheimer's. A couple of times it led to the door of people who had died just before I arrived. And it led to cemeteries. There was a particular gravesite I was looking for, and that pursuit led me into an area of reporting that was new and fascinating to me.

Joseph Edwards was a popular black employee at the Shamrock Motel in Vidalia. He did a little of everything. The Shamrock, naturally a white establishment, was where

the Silver Dollar Group was started. There was a seedy element there, including a lot of white men running in and out of rooms occupied by single white women. Information in FBI records suggests one of Edwards's responsibilities was to help procure men for the women, and he may himself have been with women there. One of the women lived at the Shamrock with her three-year old son. One day in June 1964, apparently when she was with a man in her room, she lost track of her son.

Looking for the boy, Edwards found him in the motel swimming pool, drowned or drowning, and jumped in to try to save him. Edwards himself then nearly drowned and was rescued by the boy's mother. Two weeks later, Joseph Edwards disappeared, and hasn't been found since. Edwards's disappearance is still a sorrowful and mystifying loss for his family, especially his sister.

So I've been looking for the mother of the drowned boy to see if she knows anything about what happened to Edwards. I tried to find where her son was buried. An intern from the University of North Carolina, Tori Stilwell, spent a lot of time with me trying to find old cemetery registries. We found one and, sure enough, it led us to the boy's gravesite and tombstone.

We found out that the woman, the mother, also had a daughter. Tori located the daughter and we called her. She was estranged from her mother, didn't want to talk about her, and wasn't interested in helping us find her.

Then we mentioned that we knew where her little brother was buried. There was a long pause on the phone. She had never known where he was buried, but had always wondered. She agreed to meet us at the cemetery. I felt like if I did that, she would open up. So we met there and just talked. After awhile, I showed her a picture of Joseph Edwards, then I showed her a picture of Joseph Edwards's sister.

"Joseph Edwards tried to save your brother's life," I told her, "and may have been killed in some degree because he may have been around your mother at the time." I told her that Joseph Edwards had a sister and that his sister had gone forty-six years not knowing what happened to Joe Ed. I think the parallels in their lives—two sisters trying to find some evidence of their brothers—was pretty amazing.

Well, she started crying. She had finally found the burial ground of her own brother and now she was in a position to help Joe Ed's sister maybe learn something about what happened to her own brother.

So she told us where her mother was, and we have found her. We'll have more on that later.

Who I Am

Working with the Civil Rights Cold Case Project has been a great help. They're using all the current technological techniques to convey our stories—video, audio, Facebook, and other social media. That's all pretty new to me. I know the value of video for a documentary, but having a camera rolling

when I am going about my interviews can be a distraction, so I've had to draw the line.

Last year, all my calls to former law enforcement people about the Frank Morris murder finally yielded a man who said he knew something about the case. He said his former brother-in-law, a trucker from Rayville, Louisiana, had told him years ago that he participated in the arson that killed Frank Morris.

That led me to the Rayville trucker's son, who said he had heard the same story from his father over the years. (He said his father always insisted that the plan was only to torch the building and that they had not known anyone would be inside.) Then I spoke to the trucker's former wife, who said she, too, had heard that story from a longtime friend of hers who placed himself at the arson with her former husband, the truck driver.

When it came time to talk with the trucker, I wanted to do it the way I always do: walk up to the door with my notebook in my back pocket and my pen in my shirt pocket, and just explain who I am and try to talk with them. But for reasons I understand, my colleagues on the documentary side wanted to walk up to the house with me and have their cameras rolling as I knocked on the door and confronted the trucker with these claims by his family.

But I'd never done that before and I didn't feel comfortable with it. I'd rather let people I want to interview see me as someone who wants to talk with them. I'm pretty quiet and pretty slow moving, and I just wanted to make sure I handled it the right way. I try to be non-threatening in my manner. I just want people to relax because I think they talk better that way. I know I do. That's just kind of who I am.

So I went up there alone. My colleague, filmmaker David Paperny, got worried when he didn't hear anything and came up a few minutes later with his camera running. The trucker seemed fine with it and signed his approval and we got good video. But the trucker was adamant later that he wouldn't talk to me again. I think I can get just about anybody to talk with me a second time, so I can't help but wonder if he'd have done it if there hadn't been a camera filming that first time.

I understood from the beginning of the Frank Morris case that it would be a long shot to figure out what happened and who did it. But that's just not a good reason to walk away from it. It would have been almost immoral to walk away from it. I mean, think about it, if we don't do it, who would? If we don't do it, it doesn't get done.

Sustained Outrage

Ken Ward Jr. stayed home to make a difference

Since he began reporting full-time, in 1991, **Ken Ward Jr.** has embodied the credo of Ned Chilton III, The Charleston Gazette's late publisher, that the "hallmark of crusading journalism is sustained outrage." In his twenty years covering the coal business in Appalachia, the forty-four-year-old Ward has exposed regulatory and enforcement breakdowns, as well as the corruption of corporations and individuals. In person he can be quiet, even shy, but his reporting is fierce and his sense of injustice unwavering. His work has been cited by everyone from Andrew Revkin at The New York Times to The Washington Post, PBS, and NPR. He is a three-time winner of the Scripps Howard Foundation's Edward J. Meeman Award for Environmental Reporting. He also has received the Livingston Award for Young Journalists, an Investigative Reporters and Editors medal, and an Alicia Patterson Foundation Fellowship. In 2009, he launched Coal Tattoo, a blog on the Gazette's website that takes its name from a Billy Ed Wheeler song. Coal Tattoo, driven by Ward's smart, data-driven coverage, quickly became a must-read for reporters who want to understand the coal industry in the United States. CJR's **Brent Cunningham** interviewed Ward in Charleston earlier this year.

BRENT CUNNINGHAM is CJR's managing editor. He is a native of West Virginia and has known Ward since they were both cub reporters, at competing dailies, in Charleston.



Bearing Witness

Maybe fifteen years ago, I drove up Cabin Creek hollow. This is twenty miles from the capital in Charleston, and one of the poorest areas in Kanawha County. It was Earth Day, I think, and there was some coal company-sponsored event where they were going to plant some trees. This is where the big mine at Kayford Mountain is. You've seen photos of Kayford Mountain, showing the effects of mountaintop removal, on the front of *The New York Times* and any number of places. I'm driving up there and there are kids play-

ing along the side the road, by open sewers, because at the time they didn't have city water and sewer service. I did a calculation—I can't remember the numbers now but I put it in a story at the time—of how much coal is hauled out of that particular hollow every year. It was like a billion dollars. I mean, who would stand up and say that's okay? Would the president of the company that's mining that coal really say it was okay that he was pulling a billion dollars' worth of coal out of there and the kids who live there are playing in open sewers? I don't think so. But yet, if it's kind of hidden away and the story isn't told, then it makes it okay.

I don't think I knew for sure I wanted to be a reporter until I interned at the *Gazette* in 1989. That was the summer of the Pittston coal strike, and for some reason the editors decided it was a good idea to send an intern who had never been to southern West Virginia and didn't know anything about the coal industry to cover the strike. They had a business writer covering it, and they sent me to do a color feature on the striking miners re-enacting the Blair Mountain march. Somehow that morphed into me being the main person covering the strike. They used to joke that, you know, "We'll send you out to the picket line, and it'll be okay, because you're not on the company health plan." I spent the summer riding around with Jim Noelker, who was a photographer at the *Gazette*, talking to coal miners. And that was it for me. There was something about meeting a group of people who were different from people I'd grown up with, yet the same, because, you know, coal miners in southern West Virginia are really a lot like the people who worked at the paper mill that was the big employer in my hometown. Just working people who wanted to get done with their day and go home and be with their families. Standing on picket lines and talking to coal miners, hearing stories about the last time they were on strike—I was a little naïve, but there was a romanticism to it. But also the Pittston strike was about a coal company trying to break the union and not have a big contract with good benefits, and particularly good health-care benefits for their pensioners. The injustice of all of that, that these broken-down old miners who had given their health and in some cases their lives for coal were being robbed essentially of the health care they'd been promised. I really liked telling that story. And it seemed to me that if what was happening was laid out for people clearly, they would see that it wasn't right.

Big, Dumb Projects

One of the first stories that I took on was this out-of-state garbage story. There'd been a number of proposals, framed as economic development, for these big garbage dumps, and most of them had been beaten down. But when I came to the *Gazette* there was one that was being proposed for McDowell County, the poorest of the poor in West Virginia, and the whole view in Charleston was, "Well, the people in McDowell County want it." I knew some people from McDowell

County, and they told me that wasn't true. There was an environmental reporter at the *Gazette* at the time who was convinced that the people there wanted it, so he wasn't writing about it. I remember going in to [editor] Don Marsh—and this wasn't my beat—and I said, "We need to write about this." I'd been there like three months, and I'm challenging these people who had been there a long time. I was one of Marsh's boys, you know; he hired me, and he always kind of had my back, and he said, "Okay, go down there, see what you find out." I ended up writing probably two dozen stories about it over the course of the next six, eight months, and they ended up building a landfill but it was a much smaller one than what was originally planned; it wasn't this giant, out-of-state thing. And then we took on this thing about a big pulp mill that was proposed in Mason County, and I wrote hundreds and hundreds of stories about that. Well, it never got built. That was the beginning of a series of stories about big, dumb projects. And there was something satisfying about that. But at the same time, there was a guy who worked for the PR agency that was promoting that McDowell County landfill. I remember him giving me this lecture about how if I was going to be a successful investigative journalist I needed to

The coal industry is giving people the false hope that, if we can just get rid of Obama, we'll have our next coal boom.

find something that I was in favor of, instead of just writing about things that are wrong. And that still sticks with me; he was twisting what was really going on. Because you're against something doesn't mean you're not for other things. Saying that economic development for southern West Virginia need not mean taking everybody else's trash—inherent in that is the idea that there are other kinds of economic development that might be better.

I think that most journalists, certainly in America today, are dishonest with the public by telling them that they're objective. I used to go give talks at some of the trade groups in West Virginia, and I'd use this Hunter S. Thompson quote—that objective journalism is a pompous contradiction in terms—and people would always say, "A-ha! That proves it! Ken Ward's biased, we knew it all along." And then I would say, "Well, let's talk about my biases." And I would say things like, "You know, I think everybody should be able to earn a living so they can take care of their families. I think everybody should have clean water to drink. I think everybody should have clean air to breathe. I think every kid deserves to have a chance at a good education. I think that everybody ought to share in the wealth of our nation." Nobody ever really wanted to disagree with any of that. But they didn't really like how it manifested itself in stories.

I guess somebody could say I'm being pompous, that if everyone would just see it my way....And maybe there's

some truth to that. But there's a difference between an inherent, emotional bias against something and really looking at it in a scientific sort of manner. I guess that's one way my own thinking about some of this has evolved—and it goes back to my dad. He was a high school chemistry and biology teacher, and he used to preach scientific method sort of stuff. If you're going to go at journalism the way I do, that there are injustices that need to be exposed, then you also need to do what scientists do and rigorously examine whether there's evidence that shows that your hypothesis is wrong. These days I probably spend more time trying to read what the coal industry says about mine safety or air pollution or whatever than I do reading what environmental groups say about it. Because I want to understand what they're saying.

True Facts, False Facts

I did this thing not long ago on my blog, I went to hear Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito at the Coal Association Meeting. She was waving some piece from some right-wing columnist about how the EPA was going to regulate spilled milk. It flows great with Republican ideas, you know, but it's not true. And so I wrote about how she was doing this and it wasn't true, and with the blog I can link to the Federal Register notice so readers can see for themselves. But at the same time, that guy's column got linked to on a bazillion websites, and anyone that types "EPA and milk" in Google News, the first thing they see is his column. There's a lot of noise today, obviously, and it is harder to cut through and get true facts out there. But it's even harder to dispel or debunk false facts.

There is a group called Climate Ground Zero—they're the ones doing all the tree-sitting and stuff against mountaintop removal. They have their own blog, and they are forever putting out information that's just not accurate. I get bombarded with these e-mails: "Why won't you report about this? Climate Ground Zero's the only one that will tell the whole story." Ten years ago I would have ignored it, but it's out there on the Internet now. But if you spend all your

I can't think of a higher calling journalists have than to do stories that try to make their home a better place.

time debunking that stuff then you're not getting anything else done.

Part of the reason I wanted to do Coal Tattoo was that I saw the growth of pseudo-journalism about these issues, about mountaintop removal, climate change, the coal industry. I saw this pseudo-journalism taking over the public discourse. If real journalism is to survive, I think we have to engage with that stuff to a certain extent. So much journalism that's considered the best of the best is so self-indulgent. Here's my three-million-word, seventeen-part series on education, that I

had six computer experts and three graphic artists and seven photographers and three librarians and two interns work on with me. Don't get me wrong, I love doing a big project, but we've got to do more than that. And the same kinds of tools and skills that real journalists have to sort out what's true and what's not true, and who's doing what to whom and who's winning and who's losing public policy debates—we need to deploy those things for products other than seventeen-part series that win the Pulitzer Prize. I keep trying to get our newsroom to stop calling blog posts "posts," because I think it makes them these kind of lesser forms of journalism. And they ought not be.

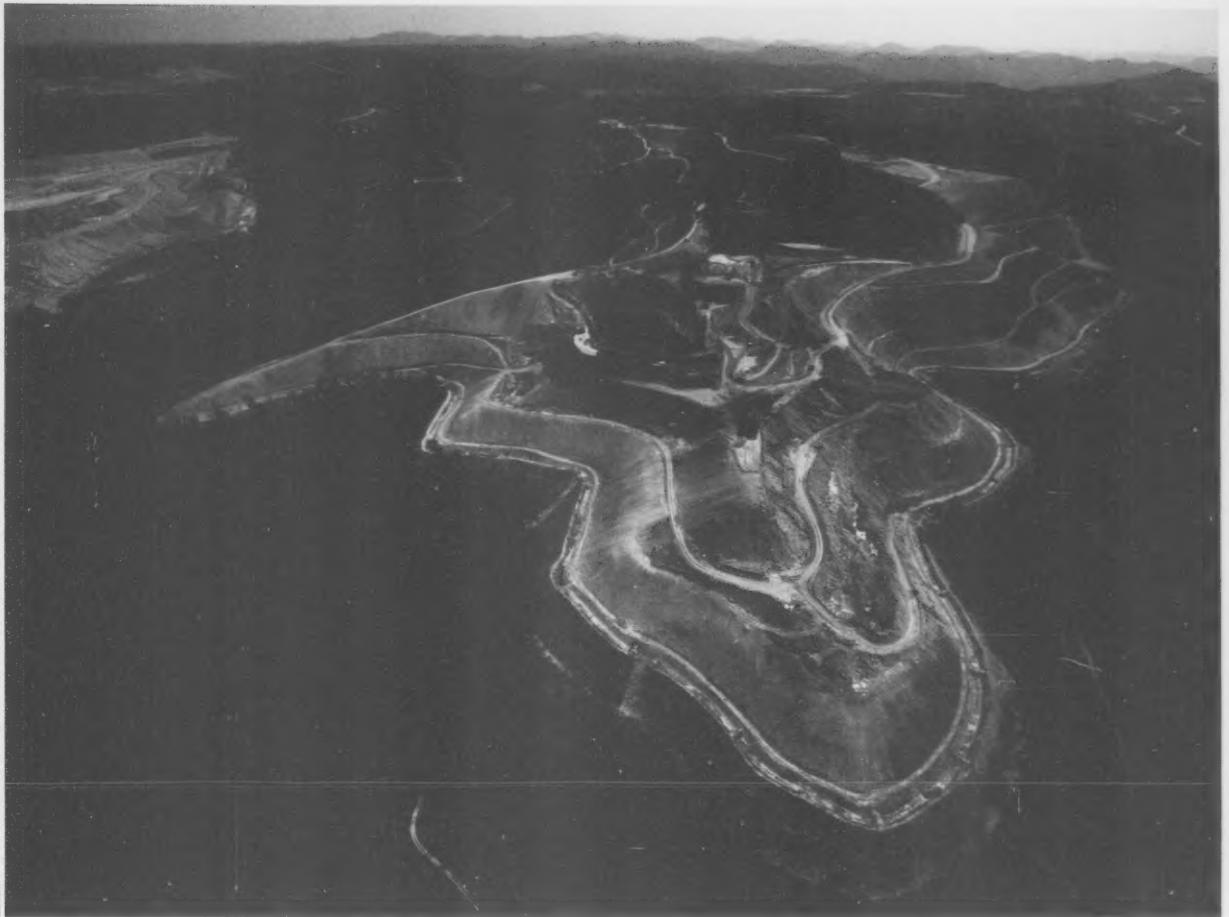
The Why and the How

My city editor always says to me, "You always have these damn documents, you don't have any people in your stories. Go find some people." And he's right. When I've done more to get more people into my stories, they're obviously always better. I did this big thing on how disasters aren't the only way coal miners die, how they die one by one a lot of different ways. That's how I learned about Bud Morris, whose picture's on my blog. Sago [an explosion at an underground mine in Sago, West Virginia, that killed twelve miners] was January of 2006. And 2005 was the safest year ever in the coal industry. And all the stories on January 1 were about how "This has been the safest year." Well, on December 30th, 2005, Bud had gotten killed. He was the last miner killed in the safest year in history. Then January 2, the day after New Year's Day, Sago blows up, and all of a sudden people care that coal mines aren't safe. Well, he had just gotten killed—what about all of these guys like him? CNN isn't there, there's no big press conference, the president doesn't come and speak.

So I understand how important those stories can be. One of the big things in journalism schools now, of course, is multimedia, and everybody talks about "storytelling." I think that maybe we need to focus a little bit less on storytelling, a little bit less on finding Joe Smith who lives near a Marcellus Shale gas well, and his story about what it was like having that big industrial complex move in next door to him, and do more of giving him information he needs to understand why that happened to him and what he could do as a citizen of this republic to change or resist the situation. I try to do stories that don't necessarily tell about somebody who's going through a difficult time, but that tell people who have gone through a difficult time why the hell it happened to them, and how their government let it happen, what powerful institution did it to them, and what can be done about it. Obviously, the best journalism kind of melds those things, but I've always been more interested in the latter than the former.

Home

Coal is a very rich topic. It's brought this endless series of disasters—death, destruction of the land—but at the same



Outrage Mountain-top removal mining is destroying ecosystems throughout Appalachia.

time, to a relatively small number of people who work directly for it, it's brought a good living...with a lot of peril that comes with that living; your life could be choked off at any minute. To an even smaller number of people—a kind of local middleman—it's brought enormous wealth. People who are lawyers or representatives and accountants for the industry; to Charleston families who are lucky enough to have somehow ended up with significant holdings of mineral rights, it's brought generations of idle wealth.

I saw these kids when I was growing up, and it wasn't coal, it was the paper mill. The mill hadn't been hiring new people for years, and as workers retired they just downsized their work force. But guys I went to school with, their grandfathers had worked there, their fathers were still working there, and they were convinced that when they got out of school they were going to get a job at the paper mill. Things are going to get booming again, it'll be great. And what politicians in West Virginia are trying to convince people of now is, if we can just stop these crazy Obama people, then we'll have our next coal boom and we'll have 100,000 coal miners working in West Virginia again. Then we won't have to worry about things

like how we educate kids for some kind of future where they can live a good life and provide for their families. Because the coal industry will take care of that again. That's the kind of false hope that they're trying to give people.

Way back when Jim Noelker and I used to ride around and talk to people in the coal fields, we never found one that wanted their kid to be a coal miner. They always said, "I'm doing this terrible work so that my kid can go to college." Now, the politicians have sold this idea that coal is their only way of life, and that they need to fight to make sure their kids *can* do that. It's a complete reversal, and that notion is kind of maddening.

I find, reporting about coal over the years, that when you get a really good story, a story that really explains something that isn't right, when you listen to the criticism you get, it isn't that the story's wrong, it's that you did the story in the first place. You're disloyal. And it comes from the coal industry, of course, but from the miners too. I've known a lot of coal miners and I have a lot of respect for them. They do *ungodly* difficult and dangerous work and they deserve every penny they get paid for it. But there's all this romanticism about

coal mining. Ten thousand people died of black lung in the last decade. Is that modern?

Working at a paper the size of the *Gazette* in this economy is not the most fun thing in the world all the time, and on days when it's not very much fun, it's like, "God, why did I do this, am I crazy?" I don't want to wake up in twenty years and think I missed some great opportunities. I've had chances to go to other places—bigger newspapers, a lot more money, more readers. I remember one interview, I went in asking this editor a bunch of questions, trying to see if she would convince me that this was a move I should make. I said, "Let me describe to you what I do now. I set my own agenda for what I'm going to do each day. I don't get assignments, or very seldom get assignments; my editors trust me to sort out what's important. So basically, I do what I want. Can you offer me a job doing that?" And of course they all say, "Wellll...." And I say, "Okay, when you can offer me that, call me." I don't get too many calls like that. I know people who work at bigger places that essentially get to do that; they get

a year to work on one story so they can try to win another Pulitzer, or turn it into their next book. And that's great, and there are people that do that whose work I admire a lot, and who have been great mentors to me. But I also know the kind of fights they have at bigger places, with layer after layer of editors or bureaucracy and, you know, the six months' worth of investigative work they did gets hacked in half at the whim of some editor who may or may not know anything about the subject matter. That doesn't appeal to me. My wife would say I'm too bullheaded and don't like anybody telling me what to do, and she's probably right.

West Virginia's my home. I've never lived anyplace else. It is impossibly rich with things for a reporter to cover. Right now I'm focusing on coal. I've written about a lot of other things, and I have a huge list of things I still want to write about. And I can't think of many places that are in need of good journalism more than West Virginia is, or what higher calling journalists have than to try to write stories that make their home a better place.

What He Knew

Anthony Shadid saw the deeper story in Iraq

Anthony Shadid is the most honored foreign correspondent of his generation: two Pulitzer Prizes, a George Polk Award, an Overseas Press Club award, book awards—the list is long. He grew up wanting to be a foreign correspondent. His grandparents had emigrated from Lebanon to Oklahoma, and he knew from a young age that he wanted to return to the Middle East, to try to comprehend it. He graduated from the journalism school at the University of Wisconsin and, with the help of a professor, landed a job on the night shift at the Milwaukee bureau of The Associated Press. He quit after a year and went to Cairo to study Arabic. He returned to the AP in 1992, and three years later was sent to Cairo at age twenty-six. "That was the great thing about the wires," he says. "I can't say it was all that good for the journalism. At twenty-six you think you know more than you really do. But it was great to be young and in the middle of a great story and a great city." After the AP, Shadid worked for The Boston Globe and The Washington Post. He is currently the Beirut bureau chief for The New York Times. He was wounded by sniper fire while on assignment in Ramallah in 2002 and was kidnapped in Libya this spring. **Terry McDermott** interviewed him in Boston earlier this year, mainly about Iraq. Shadid first went to Iraq for the AP in 1998, reporting a series on the rise of political Islam. He went again for another month in 2002, this time for the Globe.

TERRY McDERMOTT is a writer based in Southern California. He has reported from more than twenty-five countries and is the author of *101 Theory Drive: A Neuroscientist's Quest for Memory, and Perfect Soldiers: The Hijackers—Who They Were, Why They Did It*. His next book, *The Hunt for KSM*, is due out in June 2012.



Then he returned in March 2003, just before the American invasion, for the Post. When he got there, he quickly realized the story was more complicated than he had thought.

A Broken Society

People were buying guns. Iraqis always knew the potential within the society to go bad. That was another misconception of reporters in Iraq before the invasion: you're in a dictatorship, therefore no one will talk. It was always more ambiguous than that. There were always many more shades of gray. People, in fact, did talk. They may have talked in coded language. They



Street level Two boys during a sandstorm in Baghdad. Shadid told the story of Iraq through its people.

may not have talked as honestly as possible, but even before Saddam fell there was always more dissent than outsiders thought. But it did go bad. And it went bad fast.

If you had spent any time in the Middle East, you would have known that there's going to be big problems. I'll never forget standing in Firdos Square the day that statue [of Saddam] fell. I just walked down the line of tanks and interviewed people, and it broke down like this: a third saw this as an occupation and they were going to resist it; a third saw it as a liberation and they welcomed it; and a third were unsure and couldn't figure it out. And that breakdown stayed pretty much the same throughout. Until it went to hell in '04. That kind of gets to your point—the power of reporting. If you talked to enough people you were going to get a sense of what was going on.

It wasn't linear, like, okay, invasion, society traumatized, traumatized by Saddam, or whatever, and then things went bad. It was an accumulation of events that were easily reportable—from '91 on, there was a decade of sanctions that destroyed that society. What they dealt with in 2004, 2005, and 2006 was a direct repercussion of the sanctions of the '90s, it was the society coming to terms with the damage that was inflicted upon it. That was all reportable. And it was all reported. There probably should have been more, it was probably not done well enough. The connection probably should have been made stronger. But it was there before our eyes. What you saw was a broken society. It's still broken, deeply traumatized. Very sad.

I think I was in Doha, one of those places, and I was talking to my editor, Phil Bennett, who is a brilliant editor. We were saying, okay, we'll cover the invasion. This should be wrapped up in a month or two. Then let's start thinking about where else we're going to go in the region. Seven years later, 2010, I was still sitting in Baghdad. Through that first year, there was that notion of trying to get a better sense of repercussions of the invasion on the region. But in the end, the region changed Iraq; Iraq didn't change the region.

Shades of Gray

On the first day, the first couple days, I was reporting on, I forget what they called it, fear and awe? Shock and awe? Shock and awe. So I was covering the bombing, but even in those first two days I was trying to get out on the streets and talk to people, and I was putting all that color at the bottom of the story. And I'll never forget, we were editing the story the second or third day, and Phil said, "You know what's interesting, Anthony? This stuff at the bottom, the popular sentiments, is the most compelling part of the story. The top of the story was just trying to find enough adjectives to describe the violence, the bombing and so on, but here you're seeing nuance and ambiguity and again these kinds of shades of gray in what people are saying. I think you ought to focus on that and make it part of the story." And it did prove to be the most compelling part of the story. The sentiments in the end were the

arena in which the whole experience was contested. And it unfolded very quickly.

I had had it in the back of my mind to do some of that. Before the invasion started, I had talked to some friends there and made contacts so that I could go see them once the war started. I got lucky because I had a minder who did not stand in my way. I was able to see this woman who had sent her son off to fight; I was able to visit a former diplomat; I was able to see a psychiatrist whose son was doing his residency at Johns Hopkins. Those three, and then a professor who I had met before the war, those four characters, became the spine of the book that I wrote later on, *Night Draws Near*. Even in those first meetings, I knew if I could follow them, if I could

When the father said to me, 'Not even the prophet Abraham had to kill his son,' it took my breath away.

understand what they were saying, and how they changed as the events unfolded, it was going to be something very compelling, and would somehow tell us what this war represents. In some ways the legwork was done ahead of time.

How to Understand

In moments of crisis, in moments of trauma, people want someone to bear witness. It was amazing how forthcoming everyone was, and how much they wanted to talk. This was no less an event for them than September 11 was for Americans. I think that cauldron of sentiments, often contradictory, often conflicting, kind of came forth. We knew how important popular sentiment was, so the challenge was, how do we bear down, how do we find that place? It sounds elementary but I hadn't heard it before. Phil Bennett was all about, "You need to intersect environment with dialogue. Intersect the environment with interviews." That became a really powerful tool. How can I tie those two things together? This event unfolds while I'm talking to them and they will intersect with everything going on around them.

There was a young boy who was killed in a bombing and I was able to stay with him the entire day. Somehow I had to tie the day in the life, in the death, of this boy, to the broader events going on in Baghdad. It worked okay. You're on deadline; stories never match what you want them to be. In some ways, that's the task of a reporter: I don't understand this story. How do I go about making sense of it, understanding the forces at work and how those forces are interacting? We're not only trying to help our readers understand it, we're trying to help ourselves understand it at the same time.

The Most Chilling Story I Ever Covered

I did a long piece in 2009, but it was a story that began in

2003. I must have gone to this village fifteen or twenty times. There was an American military operation in May 2003, kind of a precursor to the counterinsurgency. They went into this village, made a mess of the place, arrested a lot of people. I went there to cover the aftermath of this raid. We were sitting there talking in one of these tents. All of the elders were there, sitting together. They started talking about this informer. This guy named Sabah. You could tell people were nervous because there were two tribes inside the tent. I kept asking questions and could tell they didn't want to answer. So I asked what's going to happen to this informer. Finally, a guy leaned over to me and said, "He's a dead man, but not yet."

I was stunned. They're going to kill this guy for informing to the Americans. So I kept going back to the town to find out what happened to him. Finally, he was killed. His father killed him. The actual reporting on the story, how it happened, didn't take that long. I'd say a week. The key was to see the father. The father actually did talk to me. It was the most chilling story I've ever covered. I think about it a lot. When the father said those words to me, "Not even the prophet Abraham had to kill his son," it took my breath away. I'll never forget that line, because in just one sentence it captured the whole biblical tragedy of it. The story really did haunt me. A lot of people thought the story showed the brutality of what this conflict had done to the country, but I never saw it that way. I saw it as this kind of footnote to the war, the way the smallest intervention alters a society. The American military enters this town. Sets off this chain of events that forever changes the landscape. That's what was so compelling to me about it. Finally, in 2009 I got a chance to go back and write it that way. When I went back in '09, I saw the father. He didn't want to talk, but the brother did. He took me to the grave. We talked about it. This footnote in 2003 led us to this point in 2009 and still it is far from over. There's a saying in Iraq, something along the lines of, someone's father is killed, forty years pass and the son hasn't exacted revenge. The son says, "It's still early."

Write It the Way You Feel It

The first or second morning after the invasion, I was so tired and I had spent so many years at the AP, learning the rules of keeping your distance from the story, and I said to myself, I'm just going to write it the way I feel it. From then on, I kind of just did that. I think you have to care about these stories to do them justice. And I did care about it. I care about the Middle East. You have to be careful and still there are certain rules you have to follow. But I think there's enough gray there that you can kind of get away with being a little more interpretive. It's not easy. What's so rewarding about the reporting in Egypt, the reporting in Iraq is, if you just tell peoples' stories, then they become the vehicles for these sentiments, these emotions. It becomes much more real in a certain way. Also much more honest.

The thing I see so often, especially with foreign correspon-

dents, the longer they do this, the more the story becomes about them. I think it's almost unavoidable for some of these guys who stay there for as long as they do. They've seen so much, they've experienced so much, they've talked to so many people, that in some ways to them it feels repetitive. Their own experience is so much more interesting and compelling. Which is a disaster; the antithesis of what we should be doing as foreign correspondents. It should be about the people we cover. That lesson gets lost over time. It is cynicism.

A Story Worth Dying For

What so powerfully strikes me when I go back to Iraq now, the very fabric of the place has been torn, how Iraqis consider themselves, how they see themselves, how they identify themselves, how they relate to the government, what the government represents—all those things are broken. Identity and politics have become so visceral, so tied together, it's hard to see any broader notion of state or nation.

That's kind of a feature that is writ small across the region, these conflicts over how we identify ourselves as Arabs. Those two notions, is it a broader identity or a smaller identity? I think it's in part a legacy of the Ottoman empire, and a consequence of colonialism—the ideologies that have tried to live up to the ambitions of what the region wants to be. The dysfunction of all that, and of course the conflict

with Israel, have fundamentally impacted these notions of identity. I think that's where we're at right now. That's what's so compelling about this Arab Spring—people at some level, consciously or unconsciously, are trying to heal the wounds of a century of, not just dysfunction, but of having governments fail to meet their ambitions.

Often, editors will say no story is worth risking your life for. I don't believe that. I think there are stories worth taking risks for. The way these wars have been happening in the region for so long, it produces a certain dehumanization. Such a remarkable amount of violence has been deployed in these places, so I think it is incumbent upon us as journalists to kind of recapture some of that humanity, those stories of individuals, of lives, whether they're broken or not. That felt a part of the job in Iraq, to understand these people on their own terms, in their own context, how their lives played out in ways they never expected, and maybe shouldn't have expected.

I don't know if I was always successful or not, and I think that's the frustration with journalism, the stories never match your ambition, what you want to write and say. But I was lucky, especially in 2003 and 2004, I had the full engagement of the paper, I had a story that was reportable and coverable, and I got lucky in meeting the right people and becoming a part of their lives. I do look back on it as a good time. Not a good time, but...

Tenacious

Dana Priest wants to show you how the world works

Washington Post reporter **Dana Priest** says she has always had an insatiable curiosity. At age six, she liked climbing the fences between houses in her neighborhood, looking into people's backyards to see what was going on. In high school, Priest walked through the "Do Not Enter" doors at an airport, just to see what was behind them. "People knew I was there, but nothing happened," she recalls. "That's typical of so much. Just go through it and nothing happens." Although she interned at three different newspapers during college, Priest wasn't sure she wanted to be a journalist; she went to graduate school at Columbia University to study international relations. But that summer, she got an internship on the foreign desk at the Post. And, more or less, you know the rest of the story. The winner of numerous journalism awards, Priest is an indefatigable investigator who has unearthed stories of the highest impact, including a series of stories that revealed a network of secret "black site" prisons set up around the world by the CIA for top Al Qaeda captives, for which she was awarded the 2006 Pulitzer for beat reporting; and the stories about wounded



soldiers at the Walter Reed Medical Center, for which she shared the 2008 Pulitzer for public service with co-writer and reporter Anne Hull and photographer Michel du Cille. **Jill Drew** interviewed Priest at her home in June, as she was finishing her latest book, *Top Secret America: The Rise of the New American Security State*, which she co-authored with William M. Arkin, and which was published in September by Little, Brown and Company.

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Who Elected You?

You find stories everywhere. Once, I wanted to do a series on the integration of women in the military. It was 1998. Legislation had passed that allowed women to work at lower levels, but with great barriers to a lot of things, including combat. I did a story about aides-de-camp, which are young officers, up and coming, who do everything for general officers, four-star usually. I wanted to do one on a female aide, and how that really worked out, because they've got to travel with this male general. If they're a guy, they sleep in the same room. I thought that would be a way to really talk about the cultural challenges of integrating genders.

I was following her around. We went into a briefing for the Secretary of the Army in a big room that looks kind of like something out of *Dr. Strangelove*. On the wall there was a map that showed where all US forces were that day. They were marked with little flags that were of a particular color. In my head, I was thinking, "What are we doing in Kuwait? What are we doing in Indonesia?" I was supposed to be there looking at the aide, but I was scribbling as hard as I could with a total blank face, all these different locations and all

these flags. The name on some of the flags was JCET. I made a beeline over to a couple of sources to figure out what that was. They didn't know either.

Eventually I learned it was Joint Combined Exercise Training. It became another series about what the Special Forces were doing all over the world, including in countries where Congress said you cannot have military relations because these countries abuse human rights or something. That was my entry into this whole secret world of national security, which I became obsessed with. People who work in the secret world are very thin-skinned. Partly it's because they never have to deal with the public. And that got me thinking, if they're in their cocoon, how good are they going to be at knowing how the world operates? We rely on them in some odd and disproportionate ways.

I do a fair amount of public speaking to military audiences, and when I talk to them about publishing classified information, they get really uptight and angry at the idea that the decision is ours. We don't live in a country with prior censorship. And so the first reaction—not everybody, but some people—is, "Who elected you?" And I can say,



Double tragedy Dan Shannon, an Army sniper who lost his eye in Iraq, suffered again at Walter Reed.

"Well, no one elected us, but the Constitution sets it up that way."

After 9/11, when we were writing critical stories about detentions and interrogations, people were accusing us of being traitors and putting the country at risk. Some said we should be in jail because we published classified information. But think about that: we have this great case of Iraq where we didn't perhaps try hard enough to figure out all the doubts there were. All that is classified. So if you expect the press to do its job, it can only do that job in the classified world, because that's where the government has everything about Iraq's WMD. And everything that has to do with counterterrorism. If you don't get inside, you aren't going to get any kind of story that is real. I think these days people understand that a little more than they did right after 9/11.

Soon after 9/11, my editors asked me to do the CIA beat. I thought it couldn't be that different from the military, but it's totally different. I spent the first year, no kidding, beating my head against the wall thinking I haven't gotten to the right person. I thought there must be some secret button here that I've got to push in order to get inside. I was convinced I could meet top undercover people. I was convinced that I would someday be taken with them on a mission like I had been with the military. I didn't quite get it. And finally, Bill Harlow, who is a good public affairs person in that he understood what the media was about, yelled at me and said, "Damn it, don't you understand? This is a secret organization." I know now that there's no way I'm going to go on a mission with the CIA. There's no way that I'm going to have extended conversations with people who get polygraphed all the time to see if they've had unauthorized meetings with the media. And I haven't found anybody yet who lays out anything. Instead, it's a huge puzzle that you just have to put together little by little.

A Lot of Hate Mail

"Stress and duress techniques"—that was the key phrase that made the story I did with Bart Gellman in 2002 work. That label was like the Christmas tree that you could hang everything on. And it's odd how something that's a term of art can act as the tree that can support all the other real facts. They're imprecise facts, or they're quotes that aren't clear enough to mean everything without a phrase like that.

I found this source who was a military interrogator and had been involved. He described to me what the techniques were called and somewhat about what they involve. So then we knew that there were people being interrogated in an unusual way. And they're being detained in an unusual way. There were so many questions: What are the rules for that? Are there rules for that? Is everything ad hoc? Both the agency and the military directed me to the White House and they, of course, denied anything wrong was going on. We've been following the rules; the rules work, they said. There's a quote in the story saying that we abide by the

Geneva Conventions. Well, they had a completely strange interpretation of what that meant.

That story got a typical response for that period of time: a lot of hate mail. We weren't saying that they were taking innocent people. We were saying they were taking people they thought were terrorists. And so people in the public thought, "Well, good for us. And bad for you, for criticizing that." The reaction was surprising. But there was a really supportive reaction inside the paper. My colleagues would come up and say, "This is what newspapers are all about." It made me feel

I think I was the most offended when someone who didn't know me said I was a traitor.

great. The editors were so supportive that sometimes they were worried about me more than I felt worried. I did have to go to the security people on a regular basis—nothing that I really felt unsafe about, but some people did cross the line with threats and phone calls and things like that. Some people in Congress did name names and call for imprisonment. I think I was the most offended when someone who didn't know me said I was a traitor. I had a kind of dumb, naïve reaction, but I was like, "We've never talked. How do you know I'm a traitor? How do you know anything about me?"

I'm not motivated by whether the prisons are right or wrong. I'm motivated by the fact that they were very unconventional—outside of the conventional interpretations of our more treasured laws. And because of that, the public should at least know what's happening and be able to debate it. And if then the body politic decides that's who we are now, who am I to say we're not?

I couldn't let the story go after the first one was published because now I had a million questions. A lot of my energy was focused on this secret regime. Who's doing it? Who says they can do it? Who says they can't do it? Where is the authority from? Is it legal? Of course it's legal, in the sense that someone in our government has decided it's legal. So how does detention work? Who gets to be on that list to be treated like that? How good does the information have to be on them? How are we getting that information?

And then I learn about the renditions and the idea that the CIA had its own separate system for handling terrorism suspects. I found people—some who used to be in the CIA who can talk now, some who are still in, some in the outer circle who are in touch with people being briefed by the agency in some way, some who are being briefed themselves. It's a pretty select group. I'm finding people who don't agree, or who are mortified, but I also found people who were worried about the agency's reputation. They knew when this came out that it would be tarnished. So, on the inside, they were arguing that the agency can't keep at this.

The prison story was not a story where someone led me to a narrative, either verbal or on paper. The story was put together from people who were in the US and abroad. And who were past and current government employees. Each of them responded to bits and pieces I asked them. It was the broadening of the circle that became really tricky. [Bob] Woodward has this saying that nobody tells you anything truthful during the day, only at night. I found myself working double shifts and doing a lot of restaurants, a lot of sitting in cars, a lot of sitting in odd places where you're not going to be seen. Both of you are paranoid that you're going to be seen by somebody. The telephone only works somewhat. People are paranoid about the telephone. At one point I got

I was so blacklisted that I would scare people who I would call, really scare them, because they thought the government was spying on me.

a bunch of disposable cell phones, but they were such a pain.

On any story that I do that has classified information, or information that seems very sensitive, I always call up the public affairs person when the story is about ready to go and say, "This is what we're intending to write." And then I tell them every fact in the story. I'm doing it because I could be exposing something that is potentially damaging in a way that I don't understand. So that's what I did with the prison story. It was only after I was entirely done—I did it that way so that I didn't get unduly influenced by them. I called up the public affairs office and we went through the whole thing.

They asked if I could come in. They sat me down with a very senior director of operations, the person in charge of prisons. He had never talked to anybody in the media. His point was to tell me how vulnerable the relationship between this country and the US was, and would be if the story came out. And how they might break relations, and how that might affect other countries that wouldn't be able to trust the United States to keep a secret. And that he was going to a particular country to reassure them, because they knew I knew.

I made it clear to the public affairs person that we still intended to publish the story. And so they asked for a meeting with Leonard [Downie Jr., the executive editor]. He brought a couple of other senior editors and we all went over to the agency and had another discussion. I had been filing memos to everybody about these conversations. Our lawyers were in on it. So was outside counsel. We were having discussions at least daily on what were the issues, what should be done, because ultimately it was our decision and we wanted to have thought it through. We knew what some of the issues would be, so we had already been discussing possible compromises, or what we should do and why we should do it.

At the end of the meeting, Len said, "We'll take everything into consideration."

And then the White House called and asked him to come over and meet with the President. And so he brought Bo [Jones, the publisher] and Don Graham [the CEO] and he didn't ask me. I'm just pulling their chains, although at the time I really was dying to go. I know that Bush was there and all the senior members. They really did not want this story to run. Leonard told them that we would think about it. When he came back from that meeting, we met several times. Then Len decided that we wouldn't name the countries. But he didn't really go beyond that. So, I came up with this notion that we could at least name the region, Eastern Europe. And he was fine with that.

By the time the story went into the paper, I felt like I'd been through the tough part. But that wasn't really true because then all the shit hit the fan, so to speak, in Congress. The high point and the low point was the leaders of the House and Senate committees calling for an investigation, not on the sites, but of the so-called leak, and of the newspaper. Nobody would confirm their existence, but they were going to go after us anyway. There were hearings and it became pretty heated.

I knew a lot of my sources would dry up. So I had about a half-dozen stories I had been gathering information on and most of those stories were reported out fully before the prison story was published. They all had to do with how the CIA was conducting certain operations. The agency was doing the most at that moment on counterterrorism, and that was something we should understand, how it worked. It became a way for me to educate people on a part of the government that they don't know anything about. I really had this sensation that there's this parallel world that's so important and yet so hidden. And I still feel that way. Whenever anything is going on, and we do a great set of stories about the sensitive negotiations between country X and country Y, I know that below the surface there's a whole other reality happening that we'll probably never learn about. That's how the world works.

I was so blacklisted that I would scare people who I would call, really scare them, because they thought the government was spying on me. So I gave it a rest, and moved off the beat for a while. Luckily, I stumbled into the Walter Reed story, which was so great and so different.

A Thank-You from the Secretary of Defense

People have an idea that stories always happen with an unsolicited phone call, but it had never happened to me like this. I'm sitting on the couch one evening, and a friend of mine called and said, "I have a friend who really wants to talk to you. She is a volunteer up at Walter Reed Medical Center, and she's seen some things—well, actually she's been told some things that really disturbed her. Can you talk to her?"

I thought, that's a local story, and I'm not covering military.

But this was a friend, so I met this woman for lunch, and she had a very small corner of the story. She had been volunteering up there, and had listened to the wives and mothers about the experiences that their husbands were having and that they were having, because they lived up there with them, trying to get them help. And the stories were so appalling, and they were so unbelievable that half of me didn't believe them at all. I left there with one name. She said, "Call this person." I remember thinking this was one of those too-good-to-check stories, in that kind of weird, journalistic way. But I called her friend, and I went over there for breakfast the next day. The friend, who'd been at Walter Reed longer, told me more stories. She really knew what the universe was like, and she was as convincing as the other person, and she gave me the names of four relatives who she thought would talk to me. She would call to make sure that they would talk to me without going to the authorities. We weren't sure whether the authorities would take retribution against anybody who complained.

I met three families that each had really excruciatingly detailed and different stories. Now you're into a person's medical history, their credibility. After I met the third one, I said to myself, this is probably a story not just about government bureaucracy and failure, but also about human beings. I'm not the best person to write that story. I started to think about [Post colleague] Anne Hull, who I actually hadn't said two words to before that. We didn't know each other. I went over to her desk and was very tentative because I didn't want to scare her away. I wanted her to seriously think about participating. It's funny, because when we have talked about this first discussion, she says she didn't want to scare *me* away. She was so excited about it, but she didn't want to seem overly excited. We're totally different writers, but we're similar in the sense that we are loner reporters. So the idea of teaming up, for both of us, could pose some challenges. Although, in the end, it really did not.

At first I was asking, "How can I get onto the campus?" and my sources were saying, "Just come on." All you have to do is show your driver's license, let your car be searched, and write down your name. I couldn't believe it, because of terrorism, but it was true. I didn't have to write down my organization. And, because of privacy issues, they're not allowed to ask you who are you visiting in the hospital, because the guards are not supposed to know who's in the hospital.

There are all these women walking around—mothers, sisters, girlfriends, wives, aunts. We wore casual clothes to fit in. But we knew if anyone asked us who we were, we couldn't lie. So that meant not doing things and not going places where we thought there would be someone in authority who would ask, "Well, who are you?" So we avoided things, and when people like officers would walk into a room, we would leave automatically. And, when we got into prolonged conversations with an individual soldier, you'd have to tell them pretty quickly who you were and what you were doing.

We started building a classic network of sources. We got a great source inside Walter Reed who was helpful throughout, who also gave us other sources in Walter Reed who helped to vet what the soldiers were telling us about their medical

records. We started asking all the soldiers for their medical records, and in most cases their families had these incredible files of their records—because they all had had such bad experiences with the hospital losing their records or giving them wrong records. Some of them had bought Xerox machines and put them in their rooms, because they had to do this so much.

By the time we went to the Army with our first list of thirty questions, we had the answers to them all, but we did want to give them a chance to have their say-so. Frankly, I couldn't see how they would explain them away. They decided it would be the commander at Walter Reed who would respond to all the questions. So we went over one afternoon in the winter. It was snowing. We had been there many times before, and the snow was actually one of the parts of the story, because they didn't clear the sidewalks wide enough so that the wheelchairs could get through the snow. You really had a problem if you were in a wheelchair. And they didn't do a very good job of cleaning up anyway, so if you were on crutches... One of the wives in our story had sprained or broken her ankle slipping on an un-cleared path. But the minute our car drove in, they had like three MP cars escorting us to where we were going, and then they had a completely snow-blown—the snow blower was still working on it—parking space available. And we were like, "Can you believe this?"

The reaction to the Walter Reed stories was incredibly positive, so much so that it was overwhelming and surprising. And even from the government. I have a letter on my wall from the Secretary of Defense, who thanked us for the stories. I never have thought that people who work in government are evil. On the contrary, I think they're probably trying to do a good job; they think they're doing something right. Like the CIA stuff—those are people who thought that this was the right thing to do, by and large, and no one was telling them otherwise. So for the military to say something like that, it reaffirms that point, that people want to do the right thing. They just often don't.

Still to this day, people thank me. It feels really strange, because I wrote a story. I didn't put my life on the line or anything like that. I wish I could say that everything has changed for the soldiers, but it really hasn't. I still get called and written to every week, not just Walter Reed, but people all over the world who are soldiers. Whenever I write a story, I always think, God, if only people could have been with me. This story is such a pale version of what I've seen, who I've talked to. In my dreams, I'd have a dinner party in which all my sources come together. They're such unbelievable people. I can't even believe that I get to meet people like them, who have had such amazing lives, and not always positive. They are just such characters. I want people to see these people, and their lives, because it's more of an unvarnished version.

I'd like to figure out a way to bring people along, to say, "Be on my shoulder. Talk to the source. Get these two different versions. Look at this person without an eye, and listen to him talk about being dissed by the clerk in the hospital, because she doesn't believe that he got a Purple Heart." You know, I mean, just be right there.

A Reporter in Full

Isabel Wilkerson listens

Isabel Wilkerson spent most of her journalism career at The New York Times where, as Chicago bureau chief, she won the Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the midwestern floods of 1993, and for her profile of Nicholas Whitiker, a plucky ten-year-old boy from the rough-and-tumble South Side of Chicago. She's the author of the best-selling *The Warmth of Other Suns* (2010), for which she interviewed more than 1,200 people to tell the epic story of the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the urban North and West. It won a slew of awards, including the 2011 National Book Critics Circle Award for Non-Fiction, the 2011 Hillman Book Prize, the Heartland Prize for Non-fiction, and the Lukas Prize for History, and was cited as one of the best books of the year by some twenty-five publications, including the Times, The New Yorker, and The Washington Post. Wilkerson is director of the narrative nonfiction program at Boston University. Known for her literary style, the soft-spoken Wilkerson becomes animated when talking about reporting. "The methodology is an extension of who I am," she says, likening that methodology to a mix of ethnography, anthropology, sociology, and journalism. **Pamela Newkirk** interviewed Wilkerson in New York City in April 2011.

What Would I Do?

I tend to be quiet, introverted, the one sitting on the sidelines watching. It gives you a chance to analyze from afar. At a certain point in my life I wanted to be a playwright or an architect. An architect thinks about structure; assesses the contours of the land, the pilings. A playwright thinks how this is going to look, sound, and feel on stage. My father was a civil engineer. It's how I think. I'm taking in the scene. Most of my work is with regular people. I'm extremely happy talking to regular people. The intimacy that I describe requires time and a kind of feeling that the two of you are in a bubble, a rare moment to share something important in this person's life that's going out to a larger world. When we are reporting, the definition of news when it comes to an individual is an ordinary person in an extraordinary circumstance or an extraordinary person in an ordinary circumstance.

I'm entering people's lives so I have to give thought to how to enter their world with gratitude for what they're giving, and also a sense of humility because they don't have to talk and it's often difficult to talk about and recognize the dignity of who they happen to be. I feel it's my duty then when I'm talking to people who are not famous, not celebrities, to

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recognize the responsibility that comes with that, and the privilege that is being afforded me about their willingness to open their hearts and souls to me for the greater good.

That does not mean that you don't present the fullness of their life stories, the triumphs and the trials. They're not portrayed as perfect. That's what allows people to see themselves in the people that I talk to. And they feel a connection. This is the kind of reporting I consider my calling: anthropology, ethnography, and a search for human understanding.

The joy is being able to see another person's experience from their perspective—being able to truly understand what it's like to be another person. Making these discoveries is like experiencing what feels like anthropology and archeology of the heart and spirit. Most of my work involves crisis or disaster, whether it's the flood or hurricane or the migration of millions of people: an individual at the juncture of some challenge that often they did not seek. I'm the person who comes in to convey that to a larger audience. The joy is to find that individual who will represent something larger than themselves and be open to sharing their experience with the world. It's hard work.

You Can't Recreate the Field

In every situation there's a way to carve out a little bit more time to go a little bit deeper than you otherwise would. First of all, you don't start out doing this kind of work. For me it was a matter of inserting a little bit more into even my daily news stories, some element of narrative that would bring more of a human element, some window into something potentially larger, more emotion that would have the reader connect to what it was to be in this place—whether a crime scene or a flower show. Sometimes these things would make it, sometimes they would be cut. There are opportunities in

every story, if we are open to it, to introduce the elements. Over time, editors begin to recognize this in the reporter. There will be opportunities and whenever you get one, take it and run with it, which is what I did with the Nicholas story. We did not have forever. Given how in-depth the pieces were, we did not have huge amounts of time. A couple of months searching for the person, getting in that person's world. Anthropologists take years and years. We're forced to get a whole lot done in less time. Ultimately, I put more time in the front end for the reporting and spend less time on the writing. You can't recreate the field again. It's a matter of how you apportion the time you have. I have a theory that it's about four to one, or five to one, reporting to writing. If you've done the work in the field, the writing comes easier. We're talking increments of time. If you have more time to feel open, to trust, then it will yield results in the final piece that you cannot manufacture. Sometimes you literally can't go back. The homeless are gone.

Time is a relative thing. It might mean taking a day rather than half an hour; a couple of months when ideally you would have taken a week. It means making the choice, taking the risk, to spend more time with an individual. It means finding the right individual who has insight. Who is the person the reader will be able to identify with? They're not perfect. They're candid about their trials and their triumphs. The reader has to say: I know people like this. What would you have done if you had been in this circumstance? What would you have done after Hurricane Katrina, or the tsunami, or the Haiti earthquake? That's how people learn.

Nicholas

It was during the time of a lot of drive-by shootings, and this was an attempt to go beyond the numbers. They brought together ten reporters. Each would have a topic on what it was like to be a child. Each reporter had to come up with a subject. I came up with ten things—children at risk, gangs, sexuality. Family was the tenth idea, and that was my assignment. It's everything, so where do you begin? It could be an extreme case or something so common that teaches us nothing. I had to first figure out what I was looking for: a child still dependent on a family; not a teenager; between nine and twelve. Fourth graders were perfect. Not an only child; I wanted supporting characters. I also wanted someone in the middle—not the gang-banger, not the valedictorian, more universal. You learn over time how to read people. I wasn't looking for a particular race.

I went to GED classes. I wanted movement. If you want someone fully out [of the situation], they may be looking backward. So I'm looking at someone on the cusp; trying to get out of where they are. That would give momentum.

I found a training program for nurses' assistants. They were giving out travel vouchers and there was a big turnout. I said I wanted someone who had a child age nine to twelve. I asked for names, fields, and ages of their children. Nicholas's

mother wasn't there when I made the announcement. The sheet was going around but she came in late. She sounded great on the phone. The first thing I did was ask what she did and what was she doing tomorrow. She said she was doing laundry. I went with her. I went to the laundromat and helped her fold socks. If you try to get everything you need, you won't. It's a learning process for them and for you. You learn their world and you learn what they do. It's very much like a courtship.

I was the last person on the reporting team to find someone. Nicholas was the youngest. Extra care had to be taken. I had to make sure I was on good terms with everyone involved. If it's a shorter deadline I still interview as many people. The vast majority never make it into the story. This is my process. The methodology is an extension of who I am.

I came into contact with a hundred or so families to find Nicholas. I narrowed it down to fifteen. When you interview

We use empathy. It's not pity. It's a way of seeing people as whole human beings, and of understanding what it means to be them in this circumstance.

all those people, you're studying the thing you are going to write about. You'll have more context. You can appreciate it all the more. The bar is very high for what makes a regular person newsworthy. Access, their story, chemistry, all of those things have to come together. Access is the main challenge—being able to spend the time.

As I was working on Nicholas's story I felt as if what I needed to do wasn't about journalistic techniques. I read *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* [by Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw]. It's like a survey of philosophy and field notes. A series of interactions. I didn't consider them interviews. I try to blend into their world and make it comfortable for them. It requires patience. Over time, it works.

It's humbling to realize how much you learn when you spend the time. It's a relationship. That's the first date. They're assessing you as you're assessing them. You have so many layers. I would go see them every morning. We would go to school together. It would be two below in the morning. One morning the kids were very late coming down from the apartment. I went up there and the mother got an aerosol can of religious oil and started spraying the kids. They didn't have any reaction. It was clearly something she did all the time. I didn't say anything. I didn't know what was going on. No one ever said anything. Afterward I mentioned in an almost casual way—"I noticed that, and is that something you do often and what's the goal?" And it was one of the things she did to protect them. It couldn't be in the literal sense, but she believed it would protect them, and it's a powerful scene in the story. It gives readers insight into the lengths to which an

inner-city mother felt she needed to go to protect her children from a violent world. That's an example of the humanity. What do people do when they're in violent circumstances, when gang activity is a regular part of their lives? This is one of the things she did. It was not the lead of my story. It was well into the piece. The reader was not ready to be exposed to something like that right up front. They may say, "That's a bizarre thing." They're not ready to absorb the magnitude, the show of love and protectiveness that was coming from that mother. That's what I mean about the humanity. They needed to be seen like anyone else. You have to first understand the world that they're in. I opened up with a universal experience; the universal fear of every parent. Bringing the

Giving them the space to talk is a big part of it. It's hard to keep yourself from interjecting, to move them more quickly through the story.

reader and protagonist together in a shared humanity, and then over the course of the narrative they can be exposed to additional things that the mother feels compelled to do because the experience is so extraordinary. I wanted readers to really understand what it was like to be a child in tough situations in the city.

When I won the Pulitzer, I heard from lots of different people, but it meant so much to me to hear from some of the people I had written about. The principal at Nicholas's school sent flowers and telegrams. But it's not about me. The methodology works so the people are not being portrayed as perfect. It's a full story, meaning there's a humanity—getting that balance right is a real challenge. They're human beings in a tough situation. There's an imperative to try to show the fullness; otherwise people are not going to feel the connection.

Following the People

During the floods of 1993 I was in Hardin, Missouri, a small town that was flooded so badly that the cemetery was washed away. There were so many places to write the story of this flood, so many places to go, but I ended up choosing to go to this town. The floodwaters washed away the cemetery so the people were grieving all over again. They had grieved already for their mothers, their fathers; they were re-experiencing it. They were emotionally dislocated by it. I remember talking to one woman and I said, "Where did you live?", and she couldn't remember her own address. She began looking at her bag to find something that had her address, a bill, a letter. She was teary-eyed and glazed in her facial expressions. It was stunning to me what you're exposed to. We were in the middle of trying to arrange to

talk. She couldn't tell me where she lived. That became its own story.

By the time I got there the town's story had gone on the wires. It could have been a brief, but something about it drew me. The people said the AP had already been there. I decided to stay. I went to church that day. I had not expected how traumatized they were. They actually had set up an intake center at the armory for loved ones to report relatives whose remains were believed missing from the cemetery. They had a bulletin board. It was not what you'd expect. People wanted to see for themselves. They were concerned about a particular family member. This was a story about the survivors. The people were so sweet, small-town people, humble people. I wrote on deadline. I spoke to thirty people in three or four days.

The goal is to find a portal for the story. Whose eyes? The coroner who was under a lot of pressure; a businessman who was anxious and heartsick because he had a father and a stillborn son in the cemetery. I spent time with this man who was determined to find his stillborn son, whose casket he feared had been taken by the floodwaters. I was following the people. He was friends with the coroner. When we got to the cemetery, the coroner said, "I'm not supposed to let anyone in." But seeing how distraught the man who had lost his son was, he let the two of us in. The businessman looked at the headstones, telling stories about the people. He went to the place where his family was buried. His son wasn't there. The goal is to convey that to the reader. Tolstoy has a definition for art: the transfer of emotion from one person to another.

Seeing the Whole Human Being

Coming off of fifteen years of researching and writing the book, the things that people told me were things they had not told their own grandchildren. I was so grateful to be in a position to receive this gift they were giving, not just to me but to the world. There is a chemistry that has to occur in any interaction. I think it's empathy. We use empathy. It's not pity. It's a way of seeing them as whole human beings and an attempt to understand what it means to be them in this circumstance. By listening, which is very hard to do—it's hard to keep yourself from interjecting, to move them more quickly through the story. Giving them the space to talk is a big part of it. It takes time to build up the sense of trust and courage. It is a really difficult thing to do. I don't think people realize how difficult it is. We don't have forever to get it in a linear fashion that we can just plop into a story. Getting it right is really difficult.

It's a slow-moving reporting. It means being in the moment, with the individual—they cannot be rushed. Giving them time to enunciate things they never told anyone before: "I can't believe I'm saying this to you." We should stop and take note of how huge that may be for the person in front of us. It's our job to make them feel safe to talk about difficult things, to recount these things for the greater good.



Heading north Passengers waiting to board a Greyhound bus in Memphis

ESTHER BUBLEY / LIBRARY OF CONGRESS / FSA-OWI COLLECTION

In the book, one of the most recent examples is Dr. Robert Joseph Foster, who made a treacherous drive across the mountains from Louisiana to California. He faced many experiences which were heartbreakng. He had not told his children anything. They knew he was from Monroe, Louisiana. That was about all they knew. He had not told them how difficult life had been and nothing about the drive, which was a seminal passage in the book. People who had read the book the first few months it was out, they knew more about these people than their own children knew. It was too painful. They had suppressed it from their memories and identities. They didn't want to burden their children. They wanted their children to start fresh.

I try to connect with every individual I'm interviewing. I

have experiences when I so enjoy talking to a person, like Dr. Foster out of LA. I love talking to him. He was brilliant, for one thing. He had ways of looking at the world where you were always learning.

Being able to sit at the knee of a person as they're sharing this allows the reporter to be a student and teacher, by sharing what they have told you with the wider world. Foster was a character. I sat down to talk to him the first time and he said, "I love to talk and I'm my favorite subject." The people in this book are extraordinary human beings. They had been through things and lived to tell it with forethought and consideration, prayer and deliberation, and were assessing me in their own way. So I just loved talking to them. It was like going to school, but you're majoring in this individual.

Immediate Returns

Ben Smith is not an old-school political reporter

Thirty-five-year-old **Ben Smith** reports on national politics for Politico from a rent-a-desk writers' workspace on the first floor of a blue Victorian house in Ditmas Park, Brooklyn. While Smith's widely read blog at Politico bears the tag line, "A running conversation about politics," the well-sourced, web-savvy Smith seems, at times, to be running the conversation about politics. His scoops have ranged from the splashy (presidential candidate John Edwards's \$400 haircuts, discovered in a 2007 campaign finance report) to the more substantial (the Giuliani administration having billed to obscure mayoral offices travel and security expenses from Giuliani's visits to his mistress, uncovered in 2007 through New York's Freedom of Information Law). Smith's blog, arguably the most influential reported political blog out there, is a go-to place for campaign news, as well as coverage of Smith's pet "mini-beats," labor and Jewish politics. Prior to joining Politico just before its 2007 launch, Smith wrote a political column for the New York Daily News. He has also worked for the New York Sun, The New York Observer, and The Wall Street Journal Europe, and started three blogs about New York politics and a fourth, with his wife, about Ditmas Park. CJR's **Liz Cox Barrett** interviewed Smith in Brooklyn last summer.

A Scoop a Day

At Politico there's this win-the-morning ethos. Mike Allen, he wins the morning. There is, in fact, no point in competing with him in attempting to win the morning. So my view is, I actually try to win the, sort of, late morning or early afternoon.

The best part of my sourcing and my reporting is I get a ton of e-mail from both the official sources (the press secretaries and politicians whose job it is to play the game by giving tips to bloggers like me), but also from this other universe of smart, interested people who read everything and read my blog and feel like they're having a conversation with me. That often turns into very official pieces about campaign fundraising or about what some politician is doing with some policy. It very often kind of bubbles up from the interests of readers, which is the really fun part of the reporting I do.

People talk about the immediacy of online reporting and that's definitely what that means to me. You really know who you're writing for; you know the names of who you're writing for and what they do for a living. When I started, I was a stringer for *The Wall Street Journal* in Eastern Europe. I worked for the *New York Sun*. I worked for *The New York Observer*. They were very traditional, broadsheet journalism which is really fun, but at its worst it was an academic exercise to sort of create a reverse-pyramid-shaped document that



had to fit a certain template, a certain space in the paper. I remember faxing stories to sources to ensure that they would read them. But you really often had very little sense of who was reading.

Having read blogs through the 2004 campaign, I saw there was not a New York-focused one so I started one at the *Observer*, *The Politicker*. I figured if I had fifty or a hundred readers—even ten readers—if they were the right readers, that would be great. When I was an intern at *The Jewish Daily Forward*, my first job in journalism, the joke was always, "What's your circulation?" And it was, "Well, it's two old Jews. But it's the *right* two Jews." And I always thought that was sort of a good model. If you have the right two Jews reading you, everyone else kind of has to read you. And pretty soon I could see on the *Politicker* tracker that I had fifty and then a hundred people reading and that was pretty amazing. Because I knew who they were; they were my sources. I was in this conversation with them, which is very satisfying.

In a way the *New York Sun* was great training. [Sun editor] Seth [Lipsky] had me filing like five stories a day; they were sort of like blog items. I would make calls and calls and calls. He had this great sense of the power of reporting, and that you weren't just a foreign correspondent writing about something, you were much more an active player, of necessity, if you were doing it well. Political reporting is like that no matter what; the press is so much part of the fabric, more than other beats. Lipsky once told me when he was mad that I had an instinct for the capillaries. I've been trying since then to not have an instinct for the capillaries.

I'm very scoop-driven and always have been. At the *Sun*, even though it was a very ideological place, it was a real news

LIZ COX BARRETT is a CJR staff writer covering politics and policy.

place where scoops trumped everything else. I think the rule was you were really supposed to have a scoop a day, certainly a major scoop every week. They were really trying to drive stuff. And so while I like the analytical side of blogging that Andrew Sullivan is absolutely the best at, I also love scoops. And that conversation is the way to get them. Because people know you like information and send it to you.

The most satisfying anecdote like that was in the summer of 2008, this law student in Michigan e-mails me and says, "I just had this really weird experience at an Obama rally and I think it's the sort of thing you'd be interested in because I read your blog." He, his friend, and his friend's sister had gone to a rally, and his friend and sister were Muslim. The sister had worn a headscarf. A volunteer, an Obama organizer, had seen him and his friend in business suits and said, "Can you sit in the backdrop behind the camera?" Then the sister pops up with the headscarf and the volunteer was like, "Actually, please *don't* sit in the backdrop." And then one of her friends at the event who was also wearing a headscarf had a very similar experience, was told, "We don't want anyone

who looks Muslim in the shot." It became this huge thing. Obama had to call them up and apologize. It was a really interesting moment, I thought. It really was just an ordinary person who read my blog who was peripherally involved in an event. It was the sort of story that wouldn't necessarily have been told at all. That's all changing as everyone sort of gets their own voice and sources express themselves directly.

The news cycle now is about these tiny segments, and I think my stuff is what people are talking about in any given segment reasonably often. Scoops speak for themselves. If you have some new piece of information, it gets passed around and it's fun to see people discovering something because you broke it. It's one of the basic rewards of journalism in some way, I think. To tell people stuff they didn't know.

Mistakes Are Made

It's the total dream job for me to be able to move a story forward by taking a lot of little bites at it, which is what the blog is perfect for. Often you can't get the whole thing in one



Dandy David Letterman teases John Edwards about his \$400 haircut during the 2008 campaign.

story: you have an inkling about something, but it can take fifty or more bites, you just keep poking at something until what's actually there comes out.

You make mistakes all the time. I will definitely have situations where I will write a blog item and then I will get an e-mail and I will be like, oh man, that guy is totally right and I was totally wrong. And then I'll just post the e-mail and say, this guy has a point. I have no problem reversing myself. You sort of have to allow your analysis to move or else you get really shrill and stuck in defending. I definitely allow myself to swerve and detour.

The absolute worst thing I ever did—this was sort of in that way of taking a small bite at a larger story—was when presidential candidate John Edwards was scheduled to make a big announcement in spring 2007, and an hour before I wrote a blog post based on a tip from an inside source saying Edwards would announce he was suspending his campaign, possibly even announce he was dropping out, because his wife's cancer had recurred. Edwards announced he was staying in the race.

It was such a terrible moment. Actually, a little bracket to that, I've always hated working from home. At that point I didn't have an office in Brooklyn and some days I was working from home and I did feel that my judgment was worse if I wasn't sitting at a desk surrounded by other reporters. Because it was definitely bad judgment. I had one very good source, a genuine Edwards insider whom Edwards had told—the details are little fuzzy—I think Edwards had told that morning that he was going to drop out. And either he changed his mind or had never meant it, or who knows. This guy was a totally legit source, but it was only one source. I misread the signals I was getting from the campaign where basically friendly people were saying, "Don't write this, we can't say anything but don't write this."

Yeah, it was just one source. I sort of wrote it as, "one source told me this," I didn't frame it differently but I misunderstood the impact it was going to have. I didn't have the right level of confidence for that scale of story. But all you can do is be, like, obviously I was wrong and here's why and here's exactly what happened. It wasn't—was it a mortal sin?—I hadn't made it up. It was a real source. My editors knew who the source was. The guy had either been confused or misled. The guy talked to Edwards before the event and got the wrong impression. It was a terrible moment.

Speed Bores

In 2007, Politico reporters on the campaign trail were like the scrappy upstarts, which was fun. I was just able, for a while, to move so much faster. I could sit at a press conference, type what a politician said in my blog, and it'd be online twenty minutes before anyone else because they had editorial processes that weren't fast enough for the Internet. This is no longer true. This stopped being true a couple years ago. Now Twitter is so much faster, the fact that my blog takes a minute

and a half to propagate means it's ancient and no longer a place that you go for that. A lot of people went to Politico because they were so hungry for information and we were literally the first place to have it. And that's kind of exciting for a while. But ultimately, being the guy who types fastest isn't that rewarding or interesting. So I'm happy enough to be freed of that. There was this sort of compression of the news cycle that is now very familiar, but I think we delivered that to national politics.

Now blogs feel so ancient and creaky. I think if you have a blog and an audience you can maybe hold that space you're in and as that audience ages just age with it. But Twitter has displaced blogs as the place where you see something new

I have no problem reversing myself. You sort of have to allow your analysis to swerve and detour or else you get really shrill and stuck in defending.

for the first time. So the blog has lost a bit of its rhythm and centrality. Now you have this new place for one-liners. I do a lot fewer blog items of the form, hey, look at this cool thing, because people are seeing that cool thing on Twitter. The blog is now a vehicle [laughs] for long, analytical stuff. And for news breaks, certainly. It's not the place where you conduct the central political conversation which I think I did with some success in '08.

When it's working, there's a useful interaction between my blog posts, my longer work, and Twitter. I use Twitter and the blog to promote longer work and to figure out what the broader themes are. I'll sometimes plug away at the blog and realize I have five different examples that can be woven together into a longer story or see an idea knocked down or reshaped by the people who are reading. If I have an embryonic story, I can put it out there and see whether it survives the scrutiny, use both the blog and Twitter to test things out. And I'll push blog posts or longer pieces out onto Twitter, to make sure the people who I'd like to read it are reading it.

It's Graffiti

I have this comments section, which I loathe, on my blog. This guy, Sam Graham-Felsen, a former Obama campaign blogger, recently described it as the worst comments section on the entire Internet, which I would totally go with. I've been asking Politico for two years to switch it off. It's just depressing. I initially fought really hard to have comments open. Because in New York politics, commenters were informed, real people who wanted to have a conversation that was informed by actual knowledge of people and places and things. But national politics is chimerical. People have opinions totally unmoored in reality and scream at each other

all day. A good comment section is a reason to refresh and see what the conversation's doing. Mine, it's such a sewer. It's graffiti. But we are finally testing a comments system that links users to their Facebook profiles, and I hope that'll improve it.

I ♥ Polis

I like having official sources and good relationships with the press offices, but also I don't care that much because I have this outlet that's pretty much mine. Ultimately if I screw something up, it's my fault. It's an institutional problem, but

it's much more my fault. I have freedom, enough rope to hang myself. It's harder to call an editor and scream about what I did. It's like, look, he hanged himself, yell at him. At times I am a massive irritant to campaigns, which is fine. I'm of the view it's better to be feared than loved. I like, I love, politicians and political operatives. They are people I enjoy talking to. There's a class of political reporter who, I think, hates politicians and thinks they're all criminals and thinks it's a reporter's job to expose them, and there's another class who thinks they're all heroes. The job used to be to construct these hero narratives. I really like politicians and politics and think it's an honorable calling. But not *that* honorable.

Power of Dispassion

Alan Schwarz changed football

On October 17, 2010, the Philadelphia Eagles hosted the Atlanta Falcons before a crowd of nearly 70,000. The game was expected to be a tough contest between two of the top teams in the National Football League, but the Eagles jumped out to a quick 14-0 lead and, early in the second quarter, were driving again. On third down, the Eagles lined up to pass, with wide receiver DeSean Jackson split out far to the right. After quarterback Kevin Kolb took the snap, Jackson took a few steps forward, then turned left and sprinted across the field. As Kolb's pass arrived, Jackson leaped and grabbed it, arms outstretched. He had just turned upfield when his progress was stopped by Falcons cornerback Dunta Robinson, who, arriving from the opposite direction, drove the crown of his helmet into Jackson's shoulder. The collision knocked both players to the turf for several minutes; each was later diagnosed with a concussion. But the media firestorm that ensued can't be explained only by the ferocity of Robinson's tackle, or by the concussions suffered by nine other players on what was soon dubbed "Black-and-Blue Sunday." After all, violent hits like Robinson's had been tolerated, even celebrated, in sports media for years.

*The about-face was the result, in large and improbable part, of the work of a stats-oriented freelance baseball writer named **Alan Schwarz**. In early 2007, Schwarz reported in The New York Times that Andre Waters, a former Eagle who committed suicide at age forty-four, had been found to have a degenerative condition known as chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). The Times hired Schwarz within months, and over the next four years he wrote scores of stories about the concussion-related risks faced by football players. His articles uncovered elevated dementia rates among retirees and documented obfuscation by the NFL; they prompted congressional hearings and scrutinized an unregulated helmet industry; they showed wives caring for fading husbands and communities trying to protect their children. Other reporters had covered this terrain before, but never with the persistence of Schwarz, who kept the story going by, in his words, demanding that*



*the people he was covering "make sense." In the process, he put the issue on the agenda of lawmakers, sports leagues, and the media at large—and helped create a new debate about risk and responsibility in sports. CJR's **Greg Marx** interviewed Schwarz in New York City last summer.*

The Math Geek

My first day of kindergarten, when we went around the room and everyone said what they wanted to learn, what did I say? "I want to learn square roots."

I went to college planning to become a math teacher. I just loved numbers. But by the time I majored in math, I was pretty burned out on school. And a friend of mine was on the school newspaper, *The Daily Pennsylvanian*. It had a great reputation, and it seemed like a fraternity that I could join. As a kid, I had gotten into baseball through baseball cards—I really liked the numbers. So I joined the paper and wrote sports, and by the time I graduated, I decided I wanted to be a sportswriter.

GREG MARX is a CJR staff writer covering politics and policy.



Ouch Hard hits are part of the game, but there are ways, Schwarz says, to make football "less stupid."

I did what everybody does—I sent out letters to every newspaper in the country. And I didn't get nibbles anywhere. I still have my rejection slip from Neil Amdur here at *The New York Times*. But I did have a family connection at *The National* who helped me get considered, and I got hired there as an editorial assistant. Basically, I answered phones and tried to help Mike Lupica get his stories filed. But when things started to get rough financially at the paper in late November 1990, I was in the first round of twenty-five let go.

By this time I knew some people at *Baseball America*, and it turned out they had a spot for me. I spent six years there writing and editing everything you could possibly think of involving baseball. When I left and came back to New York, I had friends all over publishing, so it wasn't that hard getting freelance gigs. I wrote for *Inside Sports*, I got my first article in the *Times*, I got on *ESPN*. I sort of knew everybody and everybody knew me, and it was a very good situation.

Fumbling Over 'Encephalopathy'

In the summer of 2005, my old editor at *Inside Sports*, who was then at the World Wrestling Federation, called me up

and said that a wrestler he knew, this former Harvard football player named Chris Nowinski, had written a book manuscript on concussions and maybe I could give him advice. I was blown away by it—not the text as much as the way everything was footnoted, and footnoted *correctly*. It was really carefully done. I just thought, wow, this is great.

Now, like everybody else I thought a concussion was a brain bruise—I had no interest in, no knowledge about the topic. But you could tell this was important. So I introduced the wrestler to a couple of publishers and agents, as a professional courtesy. But it never went anywhere, and that was the end of it. I did that stuff all the time.

I forgot all about it until about a year and a half later, when I got a call completely out of the blue from Chris Nowinski. It was late December, a couple days before Christmas. I remembered who he was—it's hard not to remember the Harvard-football-player-turned-professional-wrestler-concussion-guy. And he said, "I'm pretty sure I've got something big here, but I'm not sure I know what to do with it, and you're the only one who ever took me seriously." It was Andre Waters—Chris was in the process of having Waters's brain tissue examined for CTE.

I had to decide what to do with this. And I thought, you know what, this is very serious, it feels like a *New York Times* story. I was friendly with Tom Jolly, the sports editor of the *Times*, so I set up a meeting. I still remember all of us fumbling over the word "encephalopathy." But Tom recognized instantly that this was possibly a very big deal.

They let me do the story. In retrospect, it feels preposterous. I had barely written a word about football—I had done a couple of numbers columns, "Super Bowl excitement index" and silly things like that. Certainly not concussions. And all of a sudden I was talking to neurosurgeons and neuropsychiatrists and ultimately finding out Waters's test did come out positive, having to call the NFL, and work through what the case meant and what it didn't mean, what it might mean.

I didn't really understand neurons and protein deposits and things like that, but I didn't really need to. I listened to Chris, and I listened to Bennet Omalu, who was the neuropathologist who handled the Waters case. And then I repeated what they said to lots of leaders in the field. And if those people all say "yeah, that's significant," you as the writer don't necessarily have to understand everything. We all, frankly, fake expertise—that's almost our jobs. But also, and this is important, if there was a story at the *Times* that dealt with a scientific topic, it got vetted by Science. Someone looked at it and made sure it wasn't wrong.

Two Plus Two Equals Five

What I did bring was my math background, which really played a huge role in all of this. These doctors were telling me this condition, CTE, does not happen in regular people—it does not happen unless you bang your head over and over and over and over and over again. So this is a million-to-one shot that's come in three times in a row on NFL players who have been examined for it—Mike Webster, Terry Long, and now Andre Waters. [Webster, a star offensive lineman during the 1970s and '80s, suffered from dementia and depression after retiring; he was diagnosed with CTE after his death at age fifty in 2002. Long, a teammate of Webster's, was found to have CTE after he committed suicide in 2005 at age forty-five.]

If I didn't know anything about neuroscience, I did know enough about conditional probability to know that something was different about this group of football players. And when the NFL, or the NFL doctors, tried to tell me that those three didn't mean anything—that their published studies asserting that everything was hunky-dory were the last word on the matter—they were attacking my core belief system. They were telling me that two plus two equaled five, and I knew they were wrong. Because the point is not that there are hundreds of football players out there who are not suffering any of these types of deficits. The point is how many of them are having the deficits, and how that compares to the general population.

In February of 2007, I heard that the league was soliciting

applications for a fund to help former players who had been diagnosed with dementia and Alzheimer's, what was known as the 88 Plan. I knew instantly that that was going to be their downfall. Their strategy had always been to discredit the data or the methods of every study that had linked football with cognitive impairments. And here they were collecting the data—they were blessing the data.

And I knew that once the number of people in the plan reached a certain point, about sixty or eighty, there would be a decent sample to analyze, in terms of at what age these players were starting to show signs of dementia. I needed to wait. But I always had in the back of my mind, "I can't wait to get my hands on that list."

In January of 2009 I found out that the number of players in the plan was ninety-five. A little while later I was on the beach in Puerto Rico, with my wife. I should have been more with my wife, but I was thinking about this stuff—I just knew I was on to something. And I started sketching the numbers out on this little Marriott pad, literally while I was on the beach. I was doodling around—if there's this many people alive, what would the curve look like?

When I got home, I started calling as many people as I could, trying to find out who was in the plan. It wasn't that I needed the names themselves, but it was important to know the players' birth years, to get a sense of how old they were when they started to experience dementia. I thought somebody would just leak the list to me, but holy shit was that thing locked down. It was virtually impossible; you always heard the same small group of names. Eventually, I pieced together sixteen, and that was actually enough to have a pretty good idea of what was going on. You could basically know what the age-distribution curve was going to look like.

So the next question was, what's the denominator? How many retired players are alive? I knew that there were about

The men lived the dreams and the women lived the nightmares. Their husbands were either brain-damaged or brainwashed, but the wives got it.

13,000 living ex-players, so I sketched out a reasonable estimate of their age groups. I also happen to have a good friend who has the best biographical data on athletes of anybody, so with his help I got those numbers almost exact.

The rates I got actually weren't that alarming. But the real breakthrough came later when I noticed that the plan was only open to vested players, those who had played four or five years in the league. So the denominator just plummeted, and the rates of dementia went *whoosh*.

By August of 2009, we were getting ready to try to figure out how to publish this—"data proves," or "suggests," or "indicates," whatever verb we were going to end up comfortable with.

And then somebody leaked me the Michigan study, a phone survey commissioned by the NFL that showed these dramatically elevated rates of Alzheimer's and memory impairments among former NFL players. It was a different data set, but it proved what I had been noodling with. The numbers were

After Duerson's suicide, I was accused of helping cause it. I don't think it's fair, but it left me thinking I shouldn't be this much a part of the story.

almost identical. Basically, the NFL scooped me. Their own study scooped me. When we published that story, people finally understood.

We published my 88 Plan analysis a few months later, after the lawyer for the players' union did his own noodling with some numbers, and came out saying everything's fine. Well, it was totally fucked up. His numbers were wrong, and his analysis was wrong. And I could tell that instantly, as soon as the person who leaked it to me handed it to me, because I had studied it myself.

Dispassion Drives People Crazy

One of the challenges throughout was how to take otherwise dry material and turn it into something humane, to put a face on it. Most of the time, those faces were women. I realized pretty early that it was the men who lived the dreams, and the women who lived the nightmares. Their husbands were either brain-damaged or brainwashed, but the women got it. And so I used them to understand, to learn, to find out more.

At the same time, none of them ever said, or even suggested, that football should not be played. None of them ever said, "I hate football." Eleanor Perfetto, whose husband has degenerative dementia, said, "Hey, I'm a football fan." Linda Sanchez, the congresswoman who starred at the hearings, said she's a football fan. They're all fans; they don't want it to go away. They just want it to be less stupid.

Dispassion is incredibly powerful in a reporter. It drives people crazy. If I come off as somebody who's trying to change football, I lose something. There are people who are wired to play off the amplitudes of argument, and if you stray too far from what makes sense, *boom*—they cut you off right there. They jump into a zone more reasonable than yours, and you're sunk. But if you go down the middle, they got nothing.

It was similar with the helmet story. Helmets were something I always wanted to look at, but I never really had a chance to do it until May or June of 2010. And once I did a little digging, I learned that the standards to which helmets are held has nothing to do with concussions.

Now maybe they can't, but people think that they do. That

was the thing the guys in the helmet industry who came to hate my guts never understood—all I was saying is that the helmets, intentionally or not, are communicating a level of safety that they do not afford. The goal was just to get the consumer to realize they should pay more attention and expect more. And from there, whether the child or the parent chooses to engage in that activity is their business, it's not my business.

The helmet article, though, was also a case of me becoming part of the story in a way that I wasn't comfortable with. There was a sense that this subject was going to evolve how I decided it would. Everything that was going to come after that was just going to be because Schwarz wanted to stick his nose into it. It just didn't feel right. At the same time, a lot of people started to assume my mindset was something that it wasn't—they almost made it seem like I was a crusader. The only thing I'm a crusader for is accurate statistical statements. If I'm an advocate for anything, it's for making sense.

Part of the Story

And then there was the Dave Duerson episode, where after he killed himself I found myself getting accused of helping to cause his suicide. [In February, Duerson, a former NFL star who helped administer the league's disability plan, fatally shot himself in the chest. Apparently suspecting that he had suffered brain damage, Duerson left a note asking that his brain be examined; he was subsequently found to have had CTE.] He had read my stories, and obviously I had not painted a lot of portraits of players doing just fine. At least in writing the note—that request was caused by me.

So, of course I looked in the mirror. And maybe I had not done a good enough job of explaining that this doesn't happen to everybody, that the point is just that it happens to significantly more of them than it should. When the Duerson results were about to come out, I knew—I said, people have underreacted to all of these; they're going to overreact to this one. And so I wrote a story on how people are misinterpreting the rate at which these things are happening: just because fourteen out of the fifteen who have been examined posthumously have been found to have it, doesn't mean that fourteen out of fifteen football players have CTE. It's a completely separate mathematical animal.

But to be publicly accused of causing someone's suicide—I didn't think that was fair. It left me feeling, I don't think I'm supposed to be this much part of the story. And by that point, this had taken such a toll on me mentally. I would dream about it; I would think about it constantly. Four and a half years is a long time to be on a tightrope. It was time to see if I could get it out of my head. So I left the sports department in April, to start writing about education. I plan to retire at the *Times*, and I won't be writing about concussions when I do.

Looking back, the main lesson I learned? Never trust the phrase, "According to a study published in..." **CJR**



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SECOND READ

How the Past Saw the Present

The future of journalism has always been on journalism's mind

BY MEGAN GARBER

CJR knew about the iPad a good fifteen years before there was an iPad to know about. In a 1995 column, Stephen Isaacs reported on "the tablet," a notional device dreamed up by the Knight Ridder innovation guru Roger Fidler and based on the recognition that, with the coming of the web, "ordinary folks now have the exciting capability of tracking down original sources via their own computers." Fidler's device would be "a letter-sized, slender (inch-thick), two-pound portable electronic 'tablet'"; it would "combine both the look of a newspaper's packaging" as well as consumers' "perceived need for a mediator." Users would be "constantly downloading new stuff, much in the same formats with which they are currently familiar," and would use touch-screen technology to select stories—text, audio, video—and dive into more and more detail, "all stored in ample but tiny memory cards inserted in the machine." The tablet would, Fidler figured, "eventually supplant our favorite newspaper, radio station, television newscast, magazine, even our Rolodex."

Even our Rolodex! It's worth repeating, though: a 1995 column. Nineteen-ninety-five, the year Larry first met Sergey. The year before *The New York Times* launched nytimes.com, its sparse little "Web-site." The year when getting a CD-ROM from America Online in the mail was still cause for excitement, when we forgave our modems their crackles and squeals because their noise carried, implicitly, the promise of connection.

Writing about journalism has always meant, to some extent, writing about the future of journalism. Reporters are, constitutionally, restless. We want to know what's coming next, particularly when it affects us and our ability to do good work. And that has been true, of course, even prior to our present moment. But it's been particularly true for CJR, which is—it can't help it—a locus for professional anxiety and diligent navel-gazery.

I recently read through an imposing stack of future-of-news articles from fifty years' worth of CJR's media reporting. It was exhausting. But it was also exhilarating. And it revealed a fascinating range of reactions to *The Future*, the mother of all beats. There was the quaint (1993: "Former Senator Gore's High Performance Computing Act is transforming the Internet into a grand national research and education network..."); the breathless (1996: "Every boldfaced word or phrase in the piece indicates an Internet site you can experience yourself by linking to it. Just click."); the amusing (1983: "Research reports and consultants variously estimate that by the year 2000 from 7 to 40 percent of the population will be using some form of videotex."); the ominous (1984: "Even with secret log-on

passwords, personal files may not be secure.”).

And the range makes sense: one of the responsibilities of a magazine of ideas, after all, is to see around corners—to give readers and change-makers and industry leaders a taste of the world not just as it is, but as it will be.

celebrating the takeover...journalism is still journalism. The news, as an industry and an institution, has always faced challenges—challenges both unique to the times and common to the craft—and it’s always found a way to persevere. Changed, maybe—evolved—but intact all the same.

we ease them in gradually, sometimes grudgingly.

But if the Hyphen Index is a measure of a technology’s newness, the story of journalism’s evolution through CJR’s pages is in many ways the story of the hyphen’s dissolution. It’s a story of exoticism becoming ubiquity, of divisions resolving themselves, finally and perhaps inevitably, in convergence. Today, in late 2011, we talk about the *online* world, about *database* journalism and the promise of *multimedia*. Our talk of these technologies is no longer tentative; in fact, it is often banal, commonplace. The hybrids have become whole.

And those shifts—from the latent to the present, from the separate to the coherent—are themselves convenient metaphors for the broader trends in journalism as they’ve played out in CJR’s pages. Those pages have seen journalists come to connect with, understand, and serve their audiences in ways that were never before possible. They’ve seen the line between professional journalism and amateur fade in the hot light of shared interest and collaboration. They’ve seen the concept of the “news story” itself take new shapes with the advent of new tools.

They’ve seen the opposite movement, too, of course: the unbundling of the news form, the movement to define journalism against other forms of information, the disentangling of content from the revenue streams that sustained it, the dissolution of formerly solid business models. But CJR has generally adopted the long view. And the long view suggests that, while we may live in a time of deep disruption, the tremors are temporary. The ground will stop shaking, because it always does. And journalism will continue to be what it’s always been: a way for people to learn and participate and, finally, come together.

The ground will stop shaking because it always does. And journalism will continue to be what it’s always been: a way for people to learn and participate and come together.

And the future is anything but predictable. It is promising and frightening and beguiling and frustrating—often all at the same time.

But what’s striking about all the CJR stories—stacked, edges frayed, on my coffee table—is how intimately familiar they all seem. They are voices from the past that are eerily, wonderfully, at home in the present. *Who is a journalist?* they ask. *How will new technologies affect that?* *Will those technologies undermine our ability to do our jobs, or improve it?* *How do we better connect with our audiences?* *How can we ensure that informational substance wins out over sensational drivel?* *How can we make reporting more profitable?* *Can we sell more and better ads?* *Are financial concerns compromising our ability to do journalism at the highest level?* *Should we consider government intervention to help support our work?* *Is that what the Founders would have wanted?* *Should we care anymore what the Founders would have wanted?*

Et cetera.

There’s a comfort to all this, a sense that what we’re experiencing now, at this moment in journalism—the tremors, the crumbles, the seismic shifts—has all been experienced before. Even in a world that finds tablet computers ubiquitous rather than imaginary, even in a world that finds machines and formulas (robots, algorithms, cyborgs) taking over tasks once done by humans, even in a world that finds us, somehow, gleefully

“The dream of all journalists and conscientious owners has been to free the American newspaper from being mostly a factory,” Ben Bagdikian wrote in 1973. “That liberation has now begun.” But that liberation, courtesy of new technology, would also transform the industry from the outside in. And digital technologies, though the newest of the lot, have been the most revolutionary of all. “Computers are driving a change far larger than computer-assisted reporting, or paint programs, or digital photography,” Katherine Fulton declared in 1993. “The economic infrastructure of whole industries is going to change, and journalism along with it.” She quoted Stewart Brand: “Once a new technology rolls over you, if you’re not part of the steamroller, you’re part of the road.”

The Hyphen Index

When CJR began telling the story of the digital world and its impact on journalism, it did so—like most of its fellow publications—with a copious amount of hyphens. *On-line. Data-base. Multi-media. Log-in. E-mail.* The hyphen wasn’t just punctuation; it was also a representation of newness, of exoticness, of the semi-awkwardness of disparate things being joined together. (“E-mail,” at least at first, was an extremely strange concept.) Though the hyphens seem quaint today, they’re a good reminder of the tentative way in which new technologies insert themselves into our language and our lives. We resist them. And then

The Omnipresent Audience

Perhaps the biggest transformation involves the compact that journalism is forging with the people it serves. In 1977, in a note quoted by Fergus Bordewich, Springfield Newspapers’ Dale Freeman described that compact like so: “We can be breezy in a responsible manner. We can be shallow (hell, we are!) as well as deep. We can be both lady and a lady

of the evening. And, above all, we can shinny down from our pedestals and stop being so by God arrogant." Reaching readers on their level, Bordewich went on to note, often took the form of talking down to them: "The news must be 'simplified' for the reader who is too impatient to think about the often subtle unfolding of events; the news must be 'personalized' for the reader who is bored or alienated by the process of politics and world affairs." Though many news editors profess their desire to produce more public-interest news coverage, "they are not talking about improving it: many are, in fact, cutting it back. Editors are not talking about better-written news, they are talking about 'breezier' news. Many papers are becoming so breezy you can hear the whistling through the holes where the news might have been."

The rise of infotainment was in large part, of course, a response to the physical and psychic ubiquity of television. And the web, for its part, engendered a similar convergence of the Serious and the Silly—and encouraged, at the same time, the kind of ambient attention that has been TV's hallmark. Writing in 1996, Todd Oppenheimer, then an associate editor at the new *Newsweek Interactive*, compared online audiences to crowds on a street. Of the web and its denizens, he wrote: "Its audience is a restless bunch. Grabbing them, let alone holding their attention, requires one to reach out with much, much more. This is no world for docile publishers. This is street journalism."

Bordewich was talking about ad hoc interest, the kind of hit-and-run engagement that is both a bane and a boon to the business of online publishing. But he was also describing the way the web shapes social interactions. Oppenheimer talked of the potential offered by interactivity—the new insights, the new relationships—but he also discussed the "online" audience with just a hint of disdain. He talked of web communities' penchant for typos and interpersonal vitriol and communicative frenzy, characteristics that are now so common as to be matters of cliché. "In chat," he wrote, "those who are on-line at the same time (called 'real-time' in cyber-jargon) can type to us, or to each other, no matter where they're located. As the 'conversation' proceeds,

everyone's messages scroll madly across your screen."

Compare that to today's conventional wisdom, which holds that conversation is key to a whole range of journalistic values: engagement, interactivity, community. CJR foreshadowed that, too. As Katherine Fulton put it in a 1996 article, "Content is people, as well as information, and new media change the equation. For all the talk of interactivity, I find very few journalists who really understand its import."

Fulton quoted Melinda McAdams, who had helped in the formation of *The Washington Post's* online news service: "A journalist with little on-line experience tends to think in terms of stories, news value, public service, and things that are good to read. But a person with a lot of on-line experience thinks more about connections, organization, movement with and among sets of information, and communication among different people."

What Fulton saw was the increasing—and increasingly pivotal—role that community would play in the previously product-driven work of news reporting. The phrase "content is people" recognizes that journalism can't be, fundamentally, a product when it is also, fundamentally, a relationship. "The newspaper's approach to news has to change in order to be successful in transmitting information electronically," CompuServe's Richard Baker told Doug Underwood in 1992. "Newspapers and magazines have to embrace the concept of sharing the creation of the news." They've done so, tentatively. Increasingly, journalism-as-product and journalism-as-process are finding ways

to coexist under the same news brand, within the same journalistic framework. Journalism in the late twentieth century began to revisit its coffee-house roots, convening communities and conversations that can play out regardless of geographic and temporal divisions.

"Where can people listen to each other?" Fulton asked in 1996. "Where can they be heard? Where can they meet new people? The answer to those questions could turn out to be as important a factor in the long-term survival of some journalism institutions as the quality of their information."

The More Things Change...

It's remarkable how enduring these questions have proven. And remarkable, too, how much of CJR's wisdom from the 1960s and beyond holds up today. "There may be a contradiction between the newspaper's role as a business and its role as a medium charged with informing the public." (Lawrence Pinkham, 1961.) "The craft of journalism is losing its old-time meaning. The 'communicator' with broader skills and knowledge may be the man of the future." (Edward McSweeney, 1966.) "Nothing on the horizon indicates that the trend toward concentration of power in the news business and the mixing of news with other enterprises will diminish." (Ben Bagdikian, 1977.) "The newsweeklies: Is the species doomed?" (Bruce Porter, 1989.) "As the explosion of information continues, there will be even more need for highly skilled journalists to root through it, filter out what's important, and help put it into perspective." (Doug Underwood, 1992.) "There's an awful lot of junk on the Internet, and it's very

TED RALL



difficult separating the wheat from the chaff." (Joe Burgess, 1993.) "Strip away some of the more profitable or popular items under this current umbrella, and you could strip away the means of paying for serious reporting aimed at mass audiences.... Classified ads, that huge profit center for every newspaper, are particularly vulnerable." (Katherine Fulton, 1996.)

The concerns about journalism's path, too, remain relevant. And not just the many involving Rupert Murdoch. The admonitions take familiar shapes. In CJR's inaugural issue, Lawrence Pinkham reviewed a book titled, provocatively for the time, *The Fading American Newspaper*. "The main theme," Pinkham wrote, "running erratically through the book, is that American newspapers, faced with the double necessity of staying in business and staying in journalism, have placed the demands of the cash register ahead of informing the public, and, as a result, have lost much of their reason for existence."

Sounds familiar, right? There's a *plus ça change* quality to many of the concerns articulated about journalism's future, which is both frustrating—can't we figure things out already?—and reassuring. The challenges that journalists historically have faced may vary in their form, but not, for the most part, in their function. For fifty years, we've been asking ourselves: Where is the line between honest analysis and dispassionate objectivity? How does amateur expertise affect professional journalism? How (and to what extent) do we ensure that journalism has, ultimately, real-world impact? How, if at all, should the industry adapt to changing technologies? A 1976 piece on the influence of cable TV quoted a report by the non-partisan Committee for Economic Development: "If the move from scarcity to abundance in communications does not guarantee better or more complete information, if it only guarantees *more*, then it may well serve no constructive purpose." A 1991 article on the new ubiquity of camcorders wonders what the empowerment of amateur videographers will mean for professional journalists. An article from the next year, on "newspapers' identity crisis," finds a Knight Ridder executive making a still-

familiar observation about the future of print: "I don't see print disappearing. But I see it taking a different form." (He adds, ominously, presciently: "I'm not convinced the majority of newspaper companies will be in business in the next century.")

And then there are the predictions—framed not as predictions at all,

and that the number of reporters covering such news will decline." And then saying that "the failure to come to grips with a shift in the *idea and distribution* of information exposes newspapers to the risk of becoming an elite medium, leaving the electronic media to cater to the information tastes of the mass audience." There's Paul Saffo declar-

Concerns about journalism's path remain relevant. In CJR's inaugural issue, Lawrence Pinkham reviewed a book titled, provocatively, *The Fading American Newspaper*.

but as future-oriented declarations of fact. The kind of declarations that make you think, in retrospect, "How did they *know* that?" There's, again, the iPad thing. There's Ronald Kriss, in 1976, discussing the upcoming "wired nation"—a universal medium that would not only carry greatly expanded educational, cultural, and civic programming but would permit two-way communication with its audience and bring into being dial-a-libraries, facsimile newspapers, remote-controlled shopping, data transmission, banking by wire, electronic mail delivery, and instant national referenda." There's Dwight Morris declaring, in 1988, that "computer-assisted journalism is the new future of this business." There's our friend Roger Fidler, who, the author of a 1989 article suggested, "can see the day coming when large newspapers will have to develop a market niche to give them strong followings." There's Doug Underwood remarking, in 1992, that "as newspapers join the electronic competition, newspaper journalists are likely to find themselves ever more subject to the forces of technological change, the demands of perpetually updating the news for electronic services, and the pressure to think of their work in marketing terms." There's Dominique Wolton observing, in 1979, that "there is an increasing risk that journalistic work devoted to the coverage of general information will become less significant,

ing, in 1996, that "the future belongs to neither the conduit nor the content players, but to those who control the filtering, searching, and sense-making tools we will rely on to navigate through the expanses of cyberspace."

And: there are the doubts about the new mediums and new tools that news reporting has at its disposal, tools that expand—and, so, implicitly change—the craft of journalism, like computer-assisted reporting. Steve Weinberg's 1982 profile of early CAR journalists quotes a colleague of *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter Thomas J. Moore: "Our economy is falling apart and here's Moore playing with his expensive toy. He's a smart guy and a good reporter who should be on the street, using his sources."

The large dailies, Fidler told Doug Underwood, have been "arrogant about the future. They've looked at the technology with skepticism. But I think that's a mistake. There's a real threat there." Jon Katz followed up in a 1992 piece about TV's continuing effects on journalism: "The news media persist—at their peril—in covering this revolution as an amalgam of toys, or as more bad habits for kids. It is, in fact, a new culture of information, profoundly reshaping the leisure time and information habits of tens of millions of Americans."

What Is a Journalist? (Parts 1-215)
The predictions about journalism's future—and the declarations about its

current, transient state—lend themselves well to perhaps the most common questions in CJR's coverage: What is a journalist? And what, indeed, is journalism? (Or, better, as Neil Postman would put it: "What is the problem to which the profession of journalism is the solution?") Those questions lend themselves to pretty much any discussion of journalism's future. "A journalist, as defined by the dictionary, is 'one whose business it is to write for a public journal,'" Edward McSweeney wrote in 1966. "In the commonly accepted meaning, a journalist is a working professional whose primary concern is with words. But now as the graphic arts combine with electrical and audio-visual devices, publishing is expanding into new media of communication.... His primary activity will be to deal with meaning, whatever the symbols or methods of conveyance. He will be obliged to become master of multiple disciplines."

It's a sentiment that, obviously, reverberates—and only partially because journalists, born storytellers, often love nothing more than to tell their own stories. ("Never in my twenty-five years in this business," Hearst's Frank Benack put it, "have newspaper executives been as introspective about the 'product' as they are today." He said that in 1976. Had he said it each year since then, it would only have grown more accurate.)

But what CJR's coverage makes clear is that journalism's existential questions are, for all their ubiquity, largely irrelevant. Content may be people, as Katherine Fulton had it; but so, really, is journalism. As long as there are people who define themselves as journalists, there will be journalism. The new tools available to its practice may "have the potential for democratizing the industry," Paul Brainerd remarked in 1989. "But they are just tools. And it really depends on the people and their use of the tools." Whatever the forms it takes, and whatever the technologies that take it there, journalism is a group endeavor. As Knight Ridder's Bill Baker had it: "There are things about a newspaper that are attuned to the human spirit. And it'll be there forever." **CJR**

MEGAN GARBER, a former CJR staff writer, is an assistant editor at Nieman Journalism Lab.

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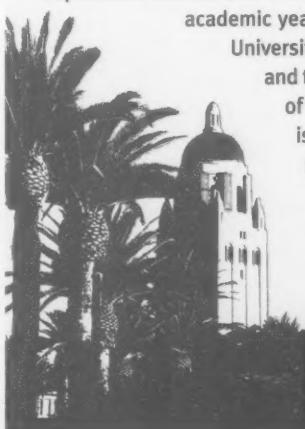
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Confidence Game

The limited vision of the news gurus

BY DEAN STARKMAN

"The question that mass amateurization poses to traditional media is 'What happens when the costs of reproduction and distribution go away? What happens when there is nothing unique about publishing anymore because users can do it for themselves?' We are now starting to see that question being answered."—Clay Shirky

"The whole notion of 'long-form journalism' is writer-centered, not public-centered."—Jeff Jarvis

"As a journalist, I've long taken it for granted that, for example, my readers know more than I do—and it's liberating."—Dan Gillmor

"As career journalists and managers we have entered a new era where what we know and what we traditionally do has finally found its value in the marketplace, and that value is about zero."—John Paton

"The story is the thing."—S. S. McClure

One

Ida M. Tarbell, a writer for *McClure's Magazine*, a general-interest monthly, was chatting with her good friend and editor, John S. Phillips, in the magazine's offices near New York's Madison Square Park, trying to decide what she should take on next.

Tarbell, then forty-three years old, was already one of the most prominent journalists in America, having written popular multipart historical sketches of Napoleon, Lincoln, and a French revolutionary figure known as Madame Roland, a moderate republican guillotined during the Terror. Thanks in part to her work, *McClure's* circulation had jumped to about 400,000, making it one of the most popular, and profitable, publications in the country.

Phillips, a founder of the magazine, was its backbone. Presiding over an office of bohemians and intellectuals, this father of five was as calm and deliberative as the magazine's namesake, S. S. McClure, was manic and extravagant. Considered by many to be a genius, McClure was also just an impossible boss—forever steaming in from Europe, throwing the office into turmoil with new schemes, ideas, and editorial changes. "I can't sit still," he once told Lincoln Steffens. "That's your job and I don't see how you can do it!"

At *McClure's*, there was always, as Tarbell would later put it, much "fingering" of a subject before the magazine decided to launch on a story, and in this case there was more than usual. The subject being kicked around was nothing less than the great industrial monopolies, known as "trusts," that had come to dominate the

American economy and political life. It was the summer of 1901.

The natural choice, in the end, was oil. Tarbell had grown up in Pennsylvania's oil country; her father had run a business making oil barrels and a small refinery; her brother worked for one of the few remaining competitors in an industry 90 percent dominated by the greatest of all monopolies, the "mother of trusts," John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company. She drew up an outline, and Phillips approved. But McClure, recovering from exhaustion, was on a doctor-ordered yearlong rest in Switzerland. "Go over," Phillips said, "and show the outline to Sam."

"I want to think it over," McClure said after Tarbell pitched the idea in a Lausanne hospital. He then announced that they would mull over the story while traveling to Greece, where McClure's family would spend the winter. "We can discuss Standard Oil in Greece as well as here," he said. So they headed south, stopping along the way for tours of Italy's Lake District and Milan—then to rest at the famous Salsomaggiore spa, where they took lengthy mud baths and "steam soaks" and contemplated just who and what they were about to take on.

Finally, eager to get started, Tarbell cut the trip short. Approval in hand, she returned to New York to begin reporting on what stands, to this day, as the greatest business story ever written.

Ah, old media. Good times. Savin' the worl'. Remember when a single investigative reporter with the temerity to demand a decent living (*McClure's* paid more than \$1 million for the stories in today's dollars) could pull the curtain back on one of the most powerful and secretive organizations on the face of the earth, a great lawbreaker as well as a value-creator? Tarbell is credited with triggering the great antitrust case that finally broke up the "octopus" in 1911. But her true greatness lies in how, using a mountain of facts carefully gathered and presented, she could explain to a bewildered and anxious middle class the great economic question of her age.

McClure's had planned a three-part series, but, as copies flew off the newsstands, it soon became seven parts, then twelve, then a national sensation. New

installments became news events in themselves, covered by other papers, including the fledgling *Wall Street Journal*. "The History of the Standard Oil Company" ended up as a nineteen-part series, quickly turned into a two-volume book. A cartoon in *Puck* would depict a pantheon of muckrakers with Tarbell as a Joan of Arc figure on horseback. Another contemporary magazine pronounced her "the most popular woman in America."

No one reading this magazine needs to be told that we have crossed over into a new era. Industrial-age journalism has failed, we are told, and even if it hasn't failed, it is over. Newspaper company stocks are trading for less than \$1 a share. Great newsrooms have been cut down like so many sheaves of wheat. Where quasi-monopolies once reigned over whole metropolitan areas, we have conversation and communities, but also chaos and confusion.

A vanguard of journalism thinkers steps forward to explain things, and we should be grateful that they are here. If they weren't, we'd have to invent them. *Someone* has to help us figure this out. Most prominent are Jeff Jarvis, Clay Shirky, and Jay Rosen, whose ideas we'll focus on here, along with Dan Gillmor, John Paton, and others. Together their ideas form what I will call the future-of-news (FON) consensus.

According to this consensus, the future points toward a network-driven system of journalism in which news organizations will play a decreasingly important role. News won't be collected and delivered in the traditional sense. It will be assembled, shared, and to an increasing degree, even gathered,

by a sophisticated readership, one that is so active that the word "readership" will no longer apply. Let's call it a usership or, better, a community. This is an interconnected world in which boundaries between storyteller and audience

resent youth). The establishment has no plan. The FON consensus says no plan is the plan. The establishment drones on about rules and standards; the FON thinkers talk about freedom and informality. FON says "cheap" and "free"; the

The cruel truth is that if one were looking for ways to undermine reporters, to turn their work into a commodity, the ideas of the Future-of-News gurus are a good place to start.

dissolve into a conversation between equal parties, the implication being that the conversation between reporter and reader was a hierarchical relationship, as opposed to, say, a simple division of labor.

At its heart, the FON consensus is anti-institutional. It believes that old institutions must wither to make way for the networked future. "The hallmark of revolution is that the goals of the revolutionaries cannot be contained by the institutional structure of the existing society," Shirky wrote in *Here Comes Everybody*, his 2008 popularization of network theory. "As a result, either the revolutionaries are put down, or some of those institutions are altered, replaced or destroyed." If this vision of the future does not square with your particular news preferences, well, as they might say on Twitter, #youmaybeSOL.

And let's face it, in the debate over journalism's future, the FON crowd has had the upper hand. The establishment is gloomy and old; the FON consensus is hopeful and young (or purports to rep-

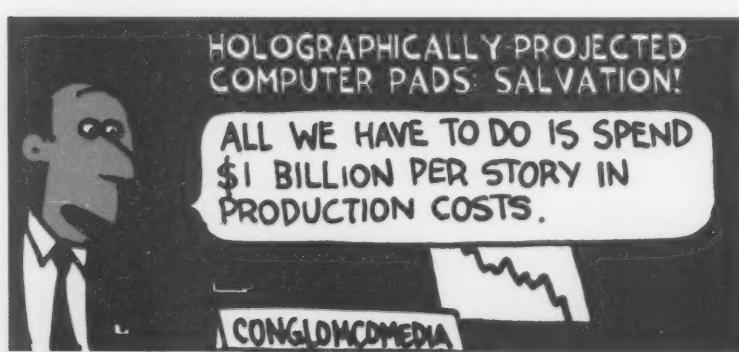
establishment asks for your credit card number. FON talks about "networks," "communities," and "love"; the establishment mutters about "institutions," like *The New York Times* or mental hospitals.

The blossoming of new voices, the explosion of conversation, has in fact been breathtaking, a modern marvel. News outlets have been forced to step down from their pedestals, and that's mostly a good thing. The idea of communities reporting on themselves, pooling knowledge in service of journalism, is indeed attractive.

But if the FON consensus is right, then the public has a problem. You can call it the Ida Tarbell problem, or you can call it the Nick Davies problem. The problem is that journalism's true value-creating work, the keystone of American journalism, the principle around which it is organized, is public-interest reporting; the kind that is usually expensive, risky, stressful, and time-consuming. Public-interest reporting isn't just another tab on the home page. It is a core value, the thing that builds trust, sets agendas, clarifies public understanding, challenges powerful institutions, and generates reform. It is, in the end, the point.

Not only does the FON consensus have little to say about public-service journalism, it is in many ways antithetical to it.

For one thing, its anti-institutionalism would disempower journalism. Jarvis and Shirky in particular have reveled in the role of intellectual undertakers/grief counselors to the newspaper industry, which, for all its many failings, has



ted rall

traditionally carried the public-service load (see Pulitzer.org for a laundry list of exposés—on tobacco-industry conspiracies; worker-safety atrocities; Lyndon Johnson's wife's dicey broadcasting empire; group-home abuses in New York; redlining in Atlanta; corruption in the St. Paul, Minnesota, fire department, the Rhode Island courts, the Chicago City Council, the University of Kentucky men's basketball program, and on and on). But their vision for replacing it with a networked alternative, or something else, is hazy at best.

Meanwhile, FON's practical prescriptions—what it calls engagement with readers—have in practice devolved into another excuse for news managers to ramp up productivity burdens, draining reporters of their most precious resource, the thing that makes them potent: time.

The journalism stakes, then, are large. Just as it was an open question a hundred years ago whether a man like Rockefeller was more powerful than the United States president, it was far from clear only a hundred days ago who was more powerful in the United Kingdom, Rupert Murdoch or the British prime minister. Today, it is clear, thanks largely to reporter Nick Davies and his editors at *The Guardian* and their long, lonely investigation into the crimes and cover-ups of Murdoch's News Corp. While the FON consensus is essentially ahistorical—we're in a revolution, and this is Year III or so—we know journalism is a continuum. What Tarbell did, Davies does, and all great reporters do, always in collaboration with the community. Who else?

Indeed, the News Corp. case offers some intriguing glimpses of a future of news that is an alternative to the FON consensus, about which a word below.

Two

FON thinkers, who emerged only in the last few years, represent a new kind of public intellectual: journalism aca-

demics known for neither their journalism nor their scholarship. Yet, the fact is they are filling a void left by an intellectually exhausted journalism establishment, and filling it with crisp, readable—and voluminous—prose that offers to connect journalism to the technocratic vanguard.

Shirky most recently wrote *Cognitive Surplus* (2010), again on the potential of digital networks. Jarvis is author



of *What Would Google Do?* (2009), a networking manifesto and paean to the search company, and *Public Parts* (2011), on the virtues of "publicness." Rosen, chairman of New York University's journalism department, blogger (Press-Think), and Tweeter, was a leader of the civic journalism movement (sometimes called public journalism), which predates the mainstreaming of the Internet but shares many traits with the networked journalism school. (Rosen, while certainly in the FON consensus, is actually something of a different breed of cat, as we'll see.) Likewise, Gillmor (*We the Media*, 2004; *Mediactive*,

2010) is an advocate of crowd-sourced, community-involved journalism. Paton, head of the Journal Register Company, a newspaper chain, is the FON practitioner, having implemented many of the social media strategies the thinkers advocate, and certainly adopted its vernacular.

And while power in the media may have been dispersed, it remains a rather small world. Jarvis and Rosen (along with Emily Bell of Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism) consult for Paton's JRC. Shirky wrote the forward to Gillmor's new book. FON thinkers appear on panels together, etc.

What their writings—particularly those of Jarvis and Shirky—share are a belief in the transformative power of networks, both for journalism and indeed for the world; and a related, but not identical, faith in the wisdom of crowds and citizen journalism, in volunteerism over professionalism, in the "journalism as conversation" over traditional models of one-to-many information delivery. The consensus believes that reporters and editors must enter into deep, if not constant, contact with readers via social media, especially Facebook and Twitter. The consensus favors "iterative" journalism—reporting on the fly, fixing mistakes along the way—versus traditional methods of story organization, fact-checking, and copyediting; it favors spontaneity and informality over formal style and narrative forms.

FON thinking has roots in the non-journalism academy, particularly in the notion of so-called peer production, the participation of citizen-amateurs in professionalized activities. Based on ideas promulgated by prominent legal theorist Yochai Benkler, media scholar Henry Jenkins, and Shirky himself, peer-production theory holds that dramatically lowered costs of organizing, communicating, and sharing will upend many sectors of modern life, journalism very much included. Advocates of

peer production (also known as social production) often point to such successful open-source collaborations as the Linux operating system and Wikipedia as harbingers of the networked future.

As Shirky writes: "Social production: people you don't know making your life better, for free."

Peer production is itself a subset of a larger body of thought about networks and society. It tends to view a wired society as a fundamentally different one—less hierarchical, more democratic, more collaborative, freer, even more authentic—from those that preceded it. Manuel Castells, an important network theorist, contends that technology will transform nothing less than "the process of formation and exercise of power relationships." Or as Nicholas Negroponte, currently on leave from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, put it, the Internet is about to "flatten organizations, globalize society, decentralize control, and help harmonize people."

If some aspects of peer-production theory and its FON offshoot sound familiar—anti-institutionalism; communitarianism laced with libertarianism; a millennial, Age-of-Aquarius vibe; a certain militancy—some scholars have traced its roots to 1960s counterculture. Fred Turner, a Stanford communications theorist and a cautionary voice on the potential of peer production, chronicled the development of a network of 1960s idealists surrounding Stewart Brand, the visionary founder of both the *Whole Earth Catalog*, the iconic communitarian manual, in 1968, and *Wired*, a New Economy-era magazine that is still the digital bible, in 1993. These "New Communitards," as Turner calls them, drew from California's defense-centered research culture as well as the counterculture to become the vanguard of the digital revolution, helping transform the very idea of the computer from a symbol of bureaucracy and control to one of personal and social liberation.

There is a culture gap between the peer-production advocates and professional journalism, it seems safe to say. Where a professional journalist might think "Watergate," peer-production adherents would think "pre-Iraq War coverage." Where establishment jour-

nalism might fondly recall elegant *Wall Street Journal* narratives and great regional exposés at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Miami Herald*, FON adherents think "pre-financial crisis Wall Street coverage" and "Gannett." In this, they have a point. What's more, peer-production advocates have had to face down some predictably defensive and mule-headed responses from segments of the old guard—curmudgeons, J-school handwringers, public-funding types, and the corporate heads who sucked out value from newspaper companies and now complain about strangers running around on their lawn.

What Shirky, a New York University lecturer and consultant, has brought to the newspaper industry, if nothing else, is a salutary sense of urgency. Essentially: wake the fuck up. In revolutionary times, Shirky reminds us in a widely quoted 2009 essay on newspapers' predicament, it is the radicals who are rational, while the voices of caution are, in fact, mad:

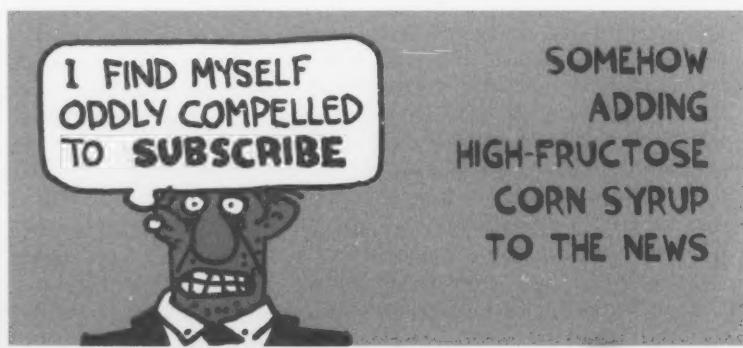
Inside the papers, the pragmatists were the ones simply looking out the window and noticing that the real world increasingly resembled the unthinkable scenario. These people were treated as if they were barking mad. Meanwhile the people spinning visions of popular walled gardens and enthusiastic micropayment adoption, visions unsupported by reality, were regarded not as charlatans but saviors.

Like Jarvis, Shirky is a leading proponent of the idea that we are passing through a watershed, not just for our generation or era, but for all of human history. This is the idea of the "Guten-

berg parenthesis," coined by a Danish scholar, that holds that the Internet has the potential to revolutionize human social life to a degree that we cannot now understand, just as Johannes Gutenberg's printing press paved the way for, eventually, modernity itself.

Shirky argues that our conventional views of work and incentives won't hold in a new era when the costs of collaboration and sharing are so low. People can, and always have, come together for many reasons. For example, he compares Wikipedia to the Shinto shrine in Ise, Japan, which is periodically torn down and rebuilt by local priests (and whose work, like many Internet toilers, is not recognized by established authority, in this case, UNESCO). "It exists not as an edifice, but as an act of love," he says. "Wikipedia exists because enough people love it and, more important, love one another in its context."

In some ways, Shirky is the most subtle and careful member of the FON crew. Many of Shirky's prescriptions for the economics of journalism are commonsensical and even wise. A point I find inarguable is that while some news models have been found to work in some contexts—*The Wall Street Journal*'s pay wall, ProPublica's fund-raising model (basically, one big donor), Talking Points Memo's online ad-based system—nothing to date is scalable. There is no news business "model" at all. And who can argue with his call for constant experimentation? "If the old model is broken, what will work in its place?" he asks rhetorically. "The answer is: Nothing will work, but everything might. Now is the time for experiments, lots and lots of experiments...."



If that last bit sounds a bit pat, another aspect of the FON debate is that ideas—even a lack of certainty—are expressed with absolute certitude. In 2010, Shirky discussed the confidence factor in a post mulling whether women “have what it takes to behave like arrogant self-aggrandizing jerks.” He recalls a turning point in his own youth when he bluffed about his drafting skills to the head of a graduate design program he was applying to: “That’s the kind of behavior I mean. I sat in the office of someone I admired and feared, someone who was the gatekeeper for something I wanted, and I lied to his face.”

Of course we know what he means, and it’s not about lying. But in FON debates, a little confidence goes a long way.

Which brings us to Jarvis. The head of the Tow-Knight Center for Entrepreneurial Journalism at CUNY’s Graduate School of Journalism, Jarvis leads by example. Like other FON thinkers, he lives the contradiction of extolling peer production and volunteerism from the security of an institution. It is doubly jarring in Jarvis’s case; an opponent of publicly funded journalism, his journalistic entrepreneurialism is, in fact, publicly subsidized. The “C” in CUNY stands for “City.”

Entrepreneurialism, certainly, is manifest in his many consulting gigs (The Guardian Media Group, The New York Times Company), speaking engagements (Edelman, Hearst, Hill & Knowlton), and self-promotional flair. He is a master of the buzzword—“googlejuice,” “generation G”—and the catchphrase—“customers are now in charge...the mass market is dead, replaced by the mass of niches...we have shifted from an economy based on scarcity to one based on abundance...small is the new big.”

Indeed, Jarvis presents himself as a walking experiment in social media, from his copious and profane tweets (“Asshole behind me on the Acela is using her phone as a speaker phone. A new frontier of train phone rudeness” [June 9, 2011]; “Hey, T-mobile, fuck your courtesy calls. Give me courtesy service” [February 19]) to providing public updates about his treatment for

prostate cancer (“I’m about to see a Sloan-Kettering doctor about my dick; That makes this the most humble day of my life” [July 29, in a joking reference to Rupert Murdoch’s testimony before Parliament]). Jarvis created a spasm of buzz during this summer’s debt ceiling debate when he launched a Twitter protest campaign under the hash tag #fuckyouwashington.

His *What Would Google Do?* is almost a caricature of network theory, hailing the search company and Internet culture as ushering in new forms of capitalism and society (emphasis mine):

We no longer need companies, institutions, or government to organize us. We now have the tools to organize ourselves. We can find each other and coalesce around political causes or bad companies or talent or business or ideas. We can share and sort our knowledge and behavior. We can communicate and come together in an instant. We also have new ethics and attitudes that spring from this new organization and change society in ways we cannot yet see, with openness, generosity, collaboration, efficiency. We are using the internet’s connective tissue to leap over borders—whether they surround countries or companies or demographics. We are reorganizing society. This is Google’s—and Facebook’s and Craigslist’s—new world order.

This kind of rhetoric reminds us that, when it comes to the future of news, we’re dealing with an issue that is defined by its uncertainty and does not—to say the least—lend itself to empirical analysis. Journalists like facts, data. Here, there aren’t any. We’re in the realm of beliefs (see confidence factor, above).

While much of Jarvis’s journalism advice is less messianic and can be frequently commonsensical (“do what you do best, link to the rest,” etc.), he is, if anything, even more emphatic than Shirky that the old must make way for the new. What the new *is* is not yet clear, but it will involve technology, networks, entrepreneurship, iterative journalism, conversations between users, and new forms of disseminating information. In this view, going “digital first,” a phrase gaining currency across journalism, means a radical revision of what news organizations do (my emphasis):

Digital first resets the journalistic relationship with the community, making the news organization less a producer and more an open platform for the public to share what it knows. *It is to that process that the journalist adds value.* She may do so in many forms—reporting, curating people and their information, providing applications and tools, gathering



data, organizing effort, educating participants... and writing articles.

The emphasis shifts from fact-gathering and storytelling to other things, like mediating, facilitating, curating. As Jarvis wrote in a 2009 blog post that he said he'd like to have delivered as a speech to a gathering of news executives:

You blew it....So now, for many of you, there isn't time. It's simply too late. The best thing some of you can do is get out of the way and make room for the next generation of net natives who understand this new economy and society and care about news and will reinvent it, building what comes after you from the ground up. There's huge opportunity there, for them.

Old elites must give way to "people"—or at least, "the next generation" of "net natives." This is Jarvis's "we," the "people," who, in all probability, are not "you." As he writes in *WWGD?* with a whiff of menace: "People can find each other anywhere and coalesce around you—or against you."

Three

To the extent that FON thinkers mau-mau the news *business*—that's a good thing. The problem is that FON thinkers (but not Rosen, as we'll see) sometimes let slip a light regard for journalism itself, that is to say, what journalists actually do.

It's not just Gillmor's obsequious catchphrase, "readers know more than I do," which may be true on some abstract level, sometimes, but on the important matters is often simply untrue. No reader—no community of

readers—knew more about Standard Oil than Ida Tarbell, though, it is true, plenty of sources came out of the woodwork to help her along the way. Just so, "readers" could not be expected to know the sweep of the *News of the World* story and its implications. It's not that Nick Davies is a genius, but he was working on the story for years, and after three decades in the business he's well-sourced and may even—dare I say it?—have professional skills or other qualities that some readers, even academics, do not.

But it goes deeper than that.

FON thinkers put forward the idea of news as a commodity, describing it variously as abundant, undifferentiated, and of low value. As a consequence, FON thinking assumes, it won't ever command much of anything in a market where the costs of distribution are basically zero.

If the argument were that the cost of replicating the news has crashed to zero, that's one thing. But FON thinkers go further. They assert that news (as opposed to, say, writing about news) is a commodity by its nature.

As Shirky wrote (my emphasis):

One way to escape a commodity market is to offer something that isn't a commodity. This has been the preferred advice of people committed to the re-invention of newspapers. It is a truism bordering on drinking game material that anyone advising newspapers will at some point say, "All you need to do is offer a product so relevant and valuable the consumer is willing to pay for it!"

This advice is well-meaning. It's just not much help. The suggestion

that newspapers should, in the future, create a digital product users are willing to pay for is merely a restatement of the problem, by way of admission that the current product does not pass that test.

Paywalls, as actually implemented, have not accomplished this. They don't expand revenue from the existing audience, they contract the audience to that subset willing to pay. Paywalls do indeed help newspapers escape commodification, but only by ejecting the readers who think of the product as a commodity. *This is, invariably, most of them.*

Set aside the fact that a "subset willing to pay" defines any business's customer base, anywhere. Notice that Shirky presents the fact that newspapers *didn't* charge for news (wonder who gave them *that* advice?) as the market's verdict that they *couldn't*.

Jarvis, too, describes a media landscape of undifferentiated abundance:

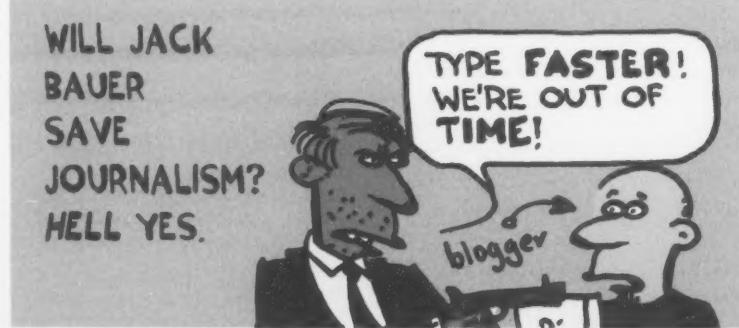
Is there any scarcity left in media?... Some argue that trust is scarce. Well I suppose that's always true, but I now have more sources for news than I have ever had—not just my local newspaper, but *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, the BBC, bloggers I respect, and more. Is quality still scarce? Yes, of course, but the more content that is made, the more opportunities there are for more people to make good content.

But wherever Jarvis lives, unless it is in Westminster, London, chances are the BBC doesn't cover it. And does it really follow that the "more content that is made," the higher the likelihood that someone will, what, cover Pawtucket City Hall? Out of love, perhaps?

I covered Pawtucket City Hall, and you had to pay me.

Seeing news as a commodity, and a near valueless one (Paton above says its value is "about zero"), is a fundamental conceptual error, and a revealing one. A commodity is the same in Anniston, Alabama, as it is in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Whatever local news is, it's not that.

As a consequence, FON thinkers have derided subscription pay walls as old-think by a generation that just doesn't get it. Shirky and Jarvis, in particular, vocally dismissed *The Wall Street Journal*.



nal's early successful pay wall (a then-heretical, now-vindicated decision made by Dow Jones's then-CEO Peter Kann), then the *Financial Times's* successful pay wall (financial news, somehow, is not a commodity; it's magic), and other spot successes as anomalies. Nor did they hesitate to point to the collapse of Times-Select, *The New York Times's* early experiment in 2005.

Jarvis, if anything, was even more certain. "The *Times* killed the service in 2007 and freed its content for a few simple reasons: first, it increased the audience to the paper's site.... Second, the *Times* could make more money on the advertising shown to digital audiences. Third,..." And so on.

But now look: the new *Times* paywall, a metered system allowing some free access, but charging for unlimited use, is working. After just four months, 224,000 users were paying for access to the paper's website, far ahead of projections. As *Advertising Age* noted, combined with the 57,000 Kindle and Nook subscribers and the roughly 100,000 users whose digital access was sponsored by Ford's Lincoln division, that meant the paper had monetized close to 400,000 online users. (Another roughly 765,000 print subscribers registered their accounts online.)

And if the argument was that only **financial** premium papers will be allowed to charge readers, the trend actually is now heading in the other direction, as more and more papers adopt some kind of content-pay system. Even dowdy Lee Enterprises, the Davenport, Iowa-based newspaper chain, announced it was charging small amounts—\$1 to \$2.95 a month—for access to sites of papers in Wyoming and Montana. Rick Edmonds, the Poynter business blogger, now describes the major players who *haven't* adopted a fee system—Gannett, McClatchy, and The Washington Post Company—as "holdouts."

Is this a panacea? No, Shirky's right. There isn't one. Lee shares trade for under a buck. But as many, including Shirky himself elsewhere, have pointed out, news isn't a commodity, but a "public good"—something that benefits everyone and, in the economic sense, something whose value doesn't dimin-

only because of the generalized collapse of news-business *advertising* models, a collapse that had nothing to do with *editorial* models. This isn't to say that the content was good or not good, only that the collapsing ad model had nothing to do with it.

The problem with conceiving of news as a commodity is that it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If that is what you think of it, that is surely what it will become. It may be okay for academics to sell this thesis, but shame on journalism executives for buying it.

In his role as provocateur, Jarvis also takes aim at the idea of storytelling. In a video talk at the #140 new-media conference, he adopted the persona of the news professional defending the idea of the story as an arrogant jerk worried about saving his job (emphasis his):

It's my job as the storyteller to tell you the story, got it? That means I decide what the story is. I decide what goes in it. I decide what doesn't go in it. I decide what's the beginning and the end because a story has to have a beginning and an end, so it fits in the hole I put it in.... When you question the form of a story, you're trying to put me out of a job.

ish no matter how many people use it (and whether they pay for it or not). Framing the news as a commodity and ultra-abundant makes it easier to give away. It also suggests a lack of understanding of what it takes to produce great beat reporting, let alone accountability journalism.

But we can see now that the news-as-cheap-commodity argument was all along an *ideological* one couched in economic terms. The idea that "information wants to be free" (a partial quote of Stewart Brand, who well understood information's value) was a catechism, a rallying cry, voiced by a certain segment of the digital vanguard. Subscription services, "walls," don't fit into a networked vision. It's worth pointing out that the commodity idea gained traction

Part of Jarvis's stock-in-trade is to throw bombs and then claim he was mischaracterized by critics, who, having been duly provoked, often do get a bit hot under the collar. After a thinking-out-loud post titled, "The Article as Luxury or Byproduct," drew criticism, he later protested, in another post:

First, far from denigrating the article, I want to elevate it. When I say the article is a luxury, I argue that using ever-more-precious resources to create an article should be taken seriously and before writing and editing a story we must assure that it will add value. Do most articles do that today? No.

But wait. Jarvis denigrates news as



supremely abundant, storytelling as an affectation or, worse, a form of oppression, and professional journalists as hacks; he consigns news organizations to the humble role of curators for people like Jarvis, if they aren't swept away all together. *Then*, he tells us he is the article's greatest friend.

Don't believe it.

As it happens, opposition to the "article" and to "storytelling" has a long, not-very-distinguished pedigree on the corporatist side of the journalism debate, from bean counters, news bureaucrats, and hacks. Most consequentially, Rupert Murdoch has long derided long-form (that is, in-depth) journalism as an affectation, journalists-writing-for-other-journalists, or, as his biographer Michael Wolff put it, the very idea of journalism as "a higher calling, of blah blah responsibility, of reverential bullshit." His acquisition of *The Wall Street Journal*'s parent resulted in a gutting of the paper's copydesk and page-one storytelling operation, and a rapid increase in news productivity requirements, a victory for "iterative" journalism, and little else.

But Murdoch knows what he's doing. As journalists from Tarbell to those at the paper Murdoch now owns have demonstrated, the long-form narrative is journalism at its most subversive. One of the most devastating *wsj* page-one "leders" of 2000, for instance, chronicled the unlikely rise from obscurity to position of influence at News Corp. of one Wendi Deng, Murdoch's wife. As it happens, leders are now an endangered species at News Corp.'s *wsj*. It figures.

Four

Certainly, FON thinkers express fealty to public-interest reporting, the apple pie of journalism debates. Shirky more than once cites *The Boston Globe*'s world-changing work over the years on the sexual predations and cover-ups in the Catholic Church as a reminder of the stakes. He frames the debate as between those who believe resources are best expended shoring up existing institutions versus those who believe, like him, that:

...the current shock in the media environment is so inimical to the 20th-century model of news production

that time spent trying to replace newspapers is misspent effort because we should really be transferring our concern to the production of lots and lots of smaller, overlapping models of accountability journalism, knowing that we won't get it right in the beginning and not knowing which experiments are going to pan out.

But while Shirky and other FON thinkers argue that upending current structures and institutions is inevitable, I would note that there's a point at which *predicting* institutional decline blurs into *rooting* for it, and then morphs into *hastening it along*, as the anti-pay wall debate shows. Arguing in favor of experimentation, is, as Shirky might put it, well-meaning, just not very helpful. If this argument is really about public-interest journalism, the only question is, what helps it, and what doesn't—now, not five hundred years from now.

"We need the new news environment to be chaotic" to facilitate experimentation, Shirky writes. In fact, though, only consultants "need" the news environment to be chaotic. The public, not so much. And who speaks for the public? Jarvis, Shirky & Co., say they do, but as Internet doubter Nicholas Carr and others have noticed, the FON vision of news's future looks very much like FON thinkers and their acolytes themselves: not just online, but thoroughly plugged-in, following the news with an obsessiveness that would make a wire editor proud, and in jobs that allow, if not encourage, media-centric work lives and even personal lives. This is all to say that no one should kid himself that when old elites fall, new ones won't take their place.

In that spirit, I'm going to make a bold leap and predict—*eenie meenie chili beanie*—that for a long time the Future of News is going to look unnervingly like the Present of News: hobbled news organizations, limping along, supplemented by swarms of new media outlets doing their best. It's not sexy, but that's journalism for you.

I'll go further and posit as axiomatic that journalism needs its own institutions for the simple reason that it reports on institutions much larger than itself. It was *The New York Times*

and Gretchen Morgenson, followed quickly by Bloomberg's late Mark Pittman, who first pried loose the truth about the bailout of American International Group: namely, that it was all about Wall Street, led by Goldman Sachs. Those tooth-and-nail battles were far from fair fights—Goldman's stock-market capitalization is about fifty (that's "five-oh") times that of the *Times*'s parent. Whether it be called *The New York Times* or the *Digital Beagle*, we must have organizations with talent, traditions, culture, bureaucrats, geniuses, monomaniacs, lawyers, health plans, marketing divisions, and ad salespeople—and they must have the clout to take on the likes of Goldman Sachs, the White House, and local political bosses.

The public needs them, and it will have them. As Michael Schudson wisely wrote back in 1995, "Imagine a world, one easily conceivable today, where governments, businesses, lobbyists, candidates, churches, and social movements deliver information directly to citizens on home computers. Journalism is momentarily abolished." After initial euphoria, confusion and power-shifting, someone credible would have to sort through the news and put it in some understandable form: "Journalism—of some sort—would be reinvented. A professional press corps would reappear...."

Five

It pays to remember that the most triumphalist FON works were written in 2008 and 2009, during journalism's time of maximum panic. But now, panic time is over. It's this non-apocalyptic moment that makes Rosen an interesting, non-millennial thinker. There is probably no more fervent believer in the potential of community involvement in journalism than Rosen, a longtime leader of the public journalism movement, which has long envisioned a much more intimate, porous, and, in Rosen's view, equal relationship between journalism and the public. His *What Are Journalists For?* (1999) explored well-intentioned, and in many ways successful, mid-1990s public journalism experiments in which newspapers actively participated in trying to solve local problems (e.g., the *Dayton Daily News* in 1994 led a search for rede-

velopment solutions after a big defense plant closed.

Similarly, few academics are more withering, and in my view, trenchant, in their critiques of mainstream media and its multiple, florid failings. In writings over the years, he has likened American press culture to a church, and a bureaucratized one, that equates mechanically playing it down the middle with finding truth, and one that takes refuge in platitudes ("if both sides are criticizing us, we must be right"). He has called the press out on its "quest for innocence," the idea that it just reports facts and has no stake in them, is not responsible for rendering judgment, and can't be held responsible, in any way, for outcomes. He has examined how mainstream news cultures tend to marginalize ideas outside certain intellectual boundaries that, when examined, prove not only to be arbitrary, but conveniently allow newsrooms to avoid hard subjects.

While hacks fight geeks over who gets to be called a "journalist," Rosen has it exactly right when he says the answer is: whoever does the work. "In journalism, real authority starts with reporting. Knowing your stuff, mastering your beat, being right on the facts, digging under the surface of things, calling around to find out what happened, verifying what you heard. 'I'm there, you're not, let me tell you about it.'"

The value of Rosen's critique is that it engages news organizations, prods them to be better, rather than dismisses them or sheds crocodile tears about their inevitable-but-oh-so-regrettable demise.

Rosen, to his credit, has also asked hard questions about his own movement. In a post before a blogger conference in 2006, he wrote that it was a "put up or shut up" moment for what he called the users-know-more-than-we-do school. As he wrote, it's not that the idea isn't desirable (all agree, it is) or even possible (or, why, he writes "did god give us the Internet"): "But how? I mean *exactly* how?" He was probably wrong about 2006 being a put-up-or-shut-up moment (after all, peer-production advocates tend to think in five-hundred-year chunks). But it is fair to point out that five years later, the "how"



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has been presented annually since 1980 to honor the book that most faithfully and forcefully reflects Robert Kennedy's purposes—his concern for the poor and the powerless, his struggle for evenhanded justice, his conviction that a decent society must assure all young people a fair chance, and his faith that a free democracy can act to remedy disparities of power and opportunity. Past winners include Vice President Al Gore, Congressman John Lewis, Taylor Branch, Toni Morrison, and Jonathan Kozol.

Entries must have been published or broadcast in the United States in 2011.

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Rebecca G. Palpant, M.S.
The Carter Center, Mental Health Program
ccmhp@emory.edu
www.cartercenter.org/health/mental_health_fellowships/index.html

is far from clear. Indeed, in reading FON literature, it is telling that the same anecdotal FON success stories—Talking Points Memo's US Attorney coverage, “macacca,” “bittergate”—keep reappearing. While Shirky says “nothing will work,” the fact is that it’s peer production that isn’t really working for news, while institutions still do.

This is not to say that the FON debate hasn’t sparked important discussion about what kinds of environments best foster journalism. News pros argue, correctly, that institutions not only provide reporters resources and backup, the best ones create valuable news cultures by aggregating people of a certain mindset. Put it this way: a lot of people are smart and skeptical, but not everyone wants to devote his or her life to uncovering graft at the public buildings authority. On the other hand, peer-production advocates have a point when they wonder whether there is something about news bureaucracies that strangles as much journalism as it nurtures. The question then becomes, though, what replaces them?

Alas, like other FON thinkers, Rosen is quicker to see the upside of disruptive technology than the problems it brings to journalism. In an interview in August with TwistImage, a blog run by a digital market executive, Mitch Joel (“digital marketing and media hacking insights and provocations from his always on/always connected world”), Rosen makes a true, if oft-repeated point, that old journalism was captive to its production requirements, the press run, the trucks, etc.

...because the thing about journalists is that they have to produce every day and have to reproduce the world every twenty-four hours. And so, the production routine becomes their god, and what journalists before the web actually specialized in was fitting the world, and what they learned that day into the very narrow slots that their production routine made available.

The irony, though, is that in the second decade of the twenty-first century—thanks in no small part to FON thinkers, including, sad to say, Rosen—journalism is now enslaved to a new system of

production. Publishing is now possible all the time and in limitless amounts, forever and ever, amen. And, given the market system, and the way the world is, that which is possible has quickly become imperative. Suddenly, the “god” of the old twenty-four-hour news cycle looks like lovely Aphrodite compared to the remorseless Ares that is the web “production routine.” And this new enslavement—trust me here—hurts readers far more even than it does the reporters who must do the blogging, tweeting, podcasting, commenting, and word-cloud formation until all hours of the day and night. This is why, IMHO, journalism is great these days at incremental news, not so good at stepping back and grabbing hold of the narrative. In some circles, this is frowned upon.

The cruel truth of the emerging networked news environment is that reporters are as disempowered as they have ever been, writing more often, under more pressure, with less autonomy, about more trivial things than under the previous monopolistic regime. Indeed, if one were looking for ways to undermine reporters in their work, FON ideas would be a good place to start:

- Remind them, as often as possible, that what they do is nothing special and is basically a commodity.
- Require them to spend a portion of their workday marketing and branding themselves and figuring out their business model.
- Require that they keep in touch with you via Twitter and FB constantly instead of reporting and writing.
- Prematurely bury/trash institutional news organizations.
- Promote a vague faith in volunteerism.
- Describe long-form writing as an affectation or even a form of oppression; that way no one will ever have time to lay out evidence gathered during extensive reporting. Great for crooks, too.

IN “THE HAMSTER WHEEL” (CJR, SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2010) I wrote that in the late 1990s, the 300-odd members of *The Wall Street Journal*’s unionized editorial staff produced about 22,000 stories a year, while doing epic work

and two full-length narratives a day. By 2008, a smaller staff was cranking out nearly twice that amount. Peer-production thinkers, whatever else they have accomplished, have not been able to crack journalism’s law of physics: to do their jobs properly, reporters need time and to think.

Now that we’re done panicking, it’s time for journalism thinkers to turn to the real task: how to re-empower reporters, the backbone of journalism, whoever they are, wherever they may work, in whatever medium, within institutions that can move the needle.

My model would take lessons from *The Guardian*/News Corp. case and would be institution-centered, network-powered. In that case, traditional investigative reporting broke the story, while social media propelled it to the stratosphere—heights the paper never could have achieved on its own. More than 150,000 people used social media, for instance, to register opposition to News Corp.’s takeover of bSkyb, which was soon scuttled. I don’t know how to secure *The Guardian*, which is on an ominous track financially, but we should agree, at least, that it must be secured. (Maybe it should take a page from the *Times*’s playbook, instead of going, as it has announced, “digital first.”) Since buzzwords are the coin of the FON realm, I’ll call it the Neo-Institutional Hub-and-Spoke Model.

A fundamental tenet of my Neo-Institutional school is that it doesn’t care about the institution for its own sake, only for the kind of reporting it produces. I can’t say the same for peer-production theorists and their networks.

Rebuilding or shoring up institutions is going to take some new, new thinking, but it can be done. In the words of that original media guru, Marshall McLuhan: “There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening.” CJR

DEAN STARKMAN, CJR’s *Kingsford Capital* fellow, runs our business desk, *The Audit*. His book, *The Watchdog That Didn’t Bark, about the business press and the financial meltdown*, will be published by Columbia University Press next year as part of a new series of CJR books. This article is available for download via Kindle and Kindle apps, on your iPhone, iPad, BlackBerry, or Android devices, as well as your computer.



CREATE YOUR OWN DIGITAL NEWS CONFERENCE KEYNOTE

In the words of overexposed pundit, professional journalism is catchphrase. The reporting that nourishes our democracy is scare word. And the revenues that support the news are threatened by scapegoat. There are bright spots. In liberal northern city, a site called misspelled proper noun is proving that ordinary citizens are empowering buzzword. In anomalous small town, a plucky startup is thriving under the sponsorship of name of wealthy dilettante. And, as a Pew study recently found, decontextualized statistic. Still, much work remains. The government must implausible tax maneuver. Legacy outlets must learn to unhelpful sports metaphor. We must support the young innovators who are using popular website to inform and engage group of college-educated white people. And, of course, we must always follow the example set by benefactor of your institution. In conclusion, antiquated humorist said it best: the news is like folksy, inapplicable saying. Thank you, and please buy my book.

A Reading List for Future Journalists

We asked some of our favorite journalists, scholars, and critics to recommend books and other works that could help the next generation of reporters become better observers, storytellers, and thinkers. Here is an edited list of the titles they suggested. For full lists from each recommender, visit cj.org/behind_the_news/reading_list.php.

Nicholas Lemann
Dean, Columbia University
Graduate School of Journalism

**London Labour and the
London Poor (1840s)**
By Henry Mayhew

Though not officially a journalist, he pretty much invented the reported urban sociological sketch, one of journalism's best and most durable forms.

**Un Grande Homme de
Province à Paris (1839)**
By Honoré de Balzac

If you're ever tempted by the thought that journalism today has fallen to an unprecedentedly low, snarky state, read this novel.

Berlin Diary (1941)
By William Shirer

Part diary, part rewrite of Shirer's CBS radio reports, it conveys both the daily feeling of the beginning of World War II and the relentless energy and courage of a great reporter at work.

The Whale Hunt (2007)
By Jonathan Harris

Everybody talks about the potential for new forms of journalistic "storytelling" online, but nobody I know has actually produced one at the level of this masterpiece of visual reporting by a young artist-programmer.

Elizabeth Kolbert
Staff writer, *The New Yorker*

The Song of the Dodo (1997)
By David Quammen

Takes a fairly arcane subject—*island biogeography*—and from it weaves a great narrative. He's an intrepid reporter and a wonderful storyteller, and any journalist can learn from him.

Desert Solitaire (1968)
By Edward Abbey

Abbey is the real thing, and those don't come along very often. His memoir-cum-elegy for the American Southwest is worth reading once a decade or so.

John Temple
Editor, *Honolulu Civil Beat*

**Prisoner Without a Name,
Cell Without a Number (1981)**
By Jacobo Timerman

Reveals the courage that journalists can be called upon to summon and how it's possible to retain one's humanity in the face of evil.

The Things They Carried (1990)
By Tim O'Brien

A lesson in writing, of the importance of detail in telling a story. It teaches journalists: look, see, remember.

Matt Welch
Editor, *Reason*

**The Collected Essays,
Journalism and Letters,
Volume II (2000)**
by George Orwell

Shows us the math of willing yourself to be an uncompromisingly honest and perceptive thinker about the most pressing issues of the day.

**If You Have a Lemon,
Make Lemonade (1974)**
By Warren Hinckle

Illustrates the missing entrepreneurial link between William Randolph Hearst and the first dot-com wave: the crazed and inspiring sons-of-bitches who clawed forth the alt-journalism revolution.

Patricia Calhoun
Editor, *Westword*

In Cold Blood (1965)
By Truman Capote

Still the gold standard for true crime writing, even if there's some fudging of the facts.

Roughing It (1872)
By Mark Twain

For the sheer joy of writing and giving a sense of place.



Kai Wright
Editorial director, *Colorlines*

Random Family (2003)

By Adrian Nicole LeBlanc
Leaves you unable to draw simple conclusions about the complicated, often no-win choices people and families must face daily.

Race Beat (2006)

By Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff
Recounts not just the coverage of the civil rights era, but the segregationists' reaction to it—which helped usher in the notion that good journalism must stick to he said/she said reporting.

Simon Rogers
Editor, *The Guardian's Datablog*

Mortality of the British

Army (1858)
By Florence Nightingale
This report used data visualizations to illustrate how preventable disease demolished the fighting capability of the British army in Crimea. A painstaking demolition of official incompetence.

Point of Departure (1968)

By James Cameron
Data journalism is about telling stories and there are few storytellers as good as James Cameron. I am still inspired by reading this book.

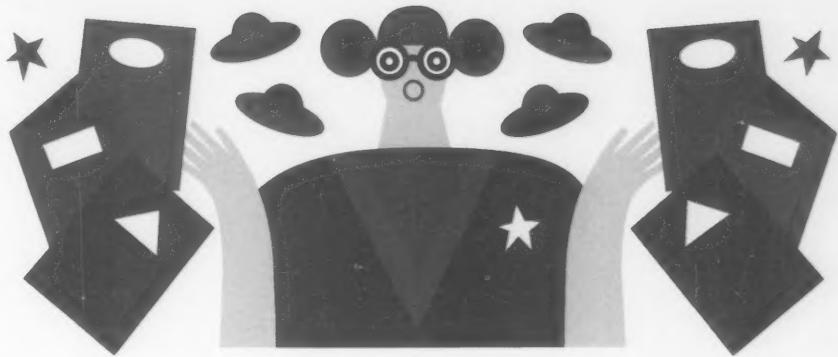
Happiness (2005)

By Richard Layard
Uses data to analyze, in detail, the health of societies around the world; helped show how GDP is a poor measure of how healthy a society is.

Earl Caldwell
Journalist and radio host

The Trust (2000)

By Susan E. Tiffet and Alex S. Jones
A must-read if you want to understand how *The New York Times* became our most important newspaper.



Melissa del Bosque
Investigative reporter
The Texas Observer

Homage to Catalonia (1938)

By George Orwell

Goes beyond reporting, literally into the trenches, to give his firsthand account of the Spanish Civil War.

The Devil's Highway (2004)

By Luis Alberto Urrea

Gives immigrants voice and dignity as they make their perilous journey north, searching for the American Dream.

Jason DeParle
Senior writer
The New York Times

Lincoln (1996)

By David Herbert Donald

A powerful reminder that conventional wisdom can change: for most of his presidency, Lincoln's contemporaries called him a bumbler.

Move Your Shadow (1985)

By Joseph Lelyveld

His reporting on South Africa provides a clinic on the craft; he mines gold from routine encounters that lesser reporters would ignore.

The Promised Land (1991)

By Nicholas Lemann

This history of the black migration is the best model I know for using narrative nonfiction to depict sweeping social change.



Scott Rosenberg
Executive editor, Grist

Understanding Comics (1993)
By Scott McCloud

Analysis of the nature of graphic narrative invites journalists (and everyone else) to continually reinvent every storytelling form we've inherited.

Within the Context of No Context (1981)
By George W.S. Trow

The Age of Missing Information (1992)
By Bill McKibben
Complementary deconstructions of TV culture serve as a valuable corrective to today's wave of Internet-determinist diatribes.

Connie Schultz
Pulitzer-winning columnist and reporter

On Writing (2000)

By Stephen King

Will cure you of adverbs, and embolden your best writer's instincts.

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn (1943)

By Betty Smith

A tutorial in how to write about the poor and working class as human beings.

Steve Lopez
Columnist, *Los Angeles Times*

1001 Afternoons In Chicago (2009)

By Ben Hecht

Hecht discovers Chicago, avoiding news conferences and press releases, by observing the city and its people, and turns his findings into art.

Jim Sleeper
Lecturer, Yale University

The Creation of the Media (2004)

By Paul Starr

How media-related decisions shaped the openness but also the gargantuan flaws of the American public sphere.

What Are Journalists For? (1999)

By Jay Rosen

Parses brilliantly such questions as, What really is the public that journalists supposedly serve, and how well do we serve it?

James Fallows
National correspondent
The Atlantic

Genius (1992)

By James Gleick

A wonderful example of how to deal comfortably with the intersection of science and public policy.

The Moral Equivalent of War (1906)

By William James

Addresses an enduring challenge for America: how to evoke any national spirit through means other than war.

Getting Things Done (2001)

By David Allen

No joke! A very clarifying way to think about how to organize your working life.

Are We Rome? (2007)

By Cullen Murphy

An example of applying historical analogies to current events.

Vanessa M. Gezari
Freelance journalist and 2011-12 Knight-Wallace fellow

Middlemarch (1871)

By George Eliot

Exemplifies the precise observation, psychological complexity, and generosity of spirit to which narrative nonfiction should aspire.

Dispatches (1997)

By Michael Herr

A perfect antidote to watered-down, on-the-one-hand, on-the-other-hand war coverage, and a testament to the power of the individual observer.

Illuminations (1969)

By Walter Benjamin

Essays on the profound changes in art, literature, and the nature of thought during the early 20th century feel current today, as changes in the quality and transmission of information transform how we think and perceive the world.

Alex Kotlowitz
Journalist and author

The Laramie Project (2001)

By Moises Kaufman, et al

Twilight (1992)

By Anna Deavere Smith

Division Street (1993)

By Studs Terkel

The Emperor (1989)

By Ryszard Kapuscinski

Ghetto Life 101 (1993)

By Dave Isay

With all the shouting and preening among journalists, these are reminders that some of the most powerful storytelling is the result of the journalist stepping out of the way.



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Ken Auletta, author; media columnist, *The New Yorker*

Dean Baquet, managing editor, *The New York Times*

Charles Gibson, former anchor, "World News," *ABC News*

Ellen Goodman, author and columnist

John F. Harris, editor-in-chief, *Politico*

Clarence Page, columnist/editorial board member, *Chicago Tribune*

Anna Quindlen, author; contributing editor, *Newsweek*

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Money Changes Everything

Independent journalism can't lean on a few rich donors

BY TOM MCGEVERAN

IN LOWER MANHATTAN AS I WRITE, THOUSANDS OF PROTESTERS, RECENTLY joined by some unions, local New York politicians, and a few celebrities, are thronging Zuccotti Park. While their message is by design not a unified one, and specific demands of the sort one expects at a protest are evidently not forthcoming, there is a loose, common belief that explains why the movement is called "Occupy Wall Street."

It's the belief that, increasingly, this country is organized for and around the interests of the very rich; that, on a profound scale, the influence of private money on government affairs is perverting the aims of collective organization through government to build a country and solve its problems.

The Occupy Wall Street movement has been compared to the Tea Party movement that sprang up in the wake of the 2008 presidential election, and which organized a similarly disparate group of interests, including Ron Paul supporters, people with certain theories about tax policy, and people with an overall distaste for what they saw as government by and for the coastal elites.

There are, of course, stark differences between the two. A more discomfiting analogy than the Tea Party to the aims and ideas of the Occupy Wall Street crowd are the aims of a subset of the very people they are protesting: a loose but similarly Washington-averse "protest movement" taking hold among America's rich. The goals of this group are populist in spirit, but the method they promote is the intervention of a superclass of billionaires in the political process in order to save it from itself. Howard Schultz, founder of Starbucks, is a prominent figure in this movement, which, like the Occupy Wall Street movement, is technically leaderless.

Schultz has pioneered a campaign aimed at getting the biggest individual donors to election campaigns to withhold their money from candidates until a bipartisan deal is reached in Washington that sets the country "on stronger long-term fiscal footing." Only then, Schultz argues, can Washington be purified of the partisan bickering in which only the vagaries of the political process itself separate left from right, or right from wrong. Similar calls to action have come from influential op-ed columnists and big-money philanthropists.

Where any of these three movements is going is impossible to tell. The billionaire club's political ambitions are still nascent, as are those of the young Occupy Wall Street protesters. The Tea Party, on the other hand, arguably controls the GOP conference in the House of Representatives and is powerful enough to shape the agenda for the Republican Party itself, for now at least.

Still, to consider the future of the country, I believe, requires contemplating

these three strands of civil action. They are evidence that this period of time is transforming in a deep way how Americans view the interaction of government and private money.

After all, it seems that government cannot achieve its objectives in any number of areas without cooperation from large corporate interests. How to reform health care without reckoning with the health-insurance industry? How to create energy independence without bargaining with the energy industry? Government negotiates with the auto and banking industries about the shape of their bailouts. To deal with education, it must work with the privately funded reform movement that is pushing charter schools and testing, among other things.

Journalism has always most strongly identified itself as a check on government. Now, though, as the lines between large private fortunes and corporate interests and the government get blurrier, journalists must begin to think of corporate America and of the super-rich as another strand of government, and guard their independence from corporate interests and the rich as carefully as they guard their independence from government.

Yet as the foundations of the business model for traditional journalism shift and change and, in some cases, fall away, what happens to that check and balance? We all know that legacy journalism outlets have been receding. Newspaper print revenue in 2010, for one example, was less than half what it was in 2005. Some newsrooms have been cut by more than half.

So in many cases journalists have turned to foundations and philanthropists, and to well-meaning venture capital, to develop new nonprofit journalism operations. Indeed, some of these outlets have attracted attention and awards. The Texas Tribune and ProPublica, two very different journalism operations, are examples: ProPublica was the first all-digital news operation to be awarded a Pulitzer, and the Texas Tribune is routinely praised for its aggressive reporting and investigation as well as its rigorous monitoring of statehouse data. The Texas Tribune was initially launched with funding from a civic-minded venture capitalist,

John Thornton, who put up \$1 million and helped raise more. ProPublica has been funded primarily by Herbert and Marion Sandler, the former chief executives of the Golden West Financial Corporation, though it, too, is working to broaden its donor base.

What tends to be forgotten in all the praise for the philanthropic model is that big handouts can come with a price. The reason for the press to be independent of a political agenda is not the danger that a bad political agenda could take over; it's that agendas in general are toxic to a certain kind of journalism.

I have had a chance to think about this: as a reporter for *The New York Blade*, a paper about gay political issues and culture, I served the readership by reporting on the finances of such important organizations as Gay Men's Health Crisis and the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center. If the paper, instead of being employee-owned, had been financed by do-gooders with deep pockets and a passion for local AIDS charities and gay political causes, how possible would that have been? Our money would have come from the same sources as many of the places we were reporting on.

Even charities that mean to do good work for journalism in particular must observe a different kind of restraint from straight-up capitalists if they want the journalism they fund to be truly independent: they must decide that even their good works are open to critique and interpretation by the reporters they're paying. That can be a harder pill to swallow in practice than it is in theory, even for the most enlightened funders.

The danger here is that philanthropy has given the moneyed class the potential to exert a new pull on journalism. And in a world where the lines between private money and government continue to blur, serious journalism must resist that pull and guard its independence—with business prowess, rigorous cost efficiency, and by spreading wide the donor base.

A. J. Liebling's famous formulation, "freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one," has a different ring today. An expensive press is no longer necessary; he who owns the publication has the freedom, something more

What tends to be forgotten is that big handouts can come with a price.

possible than ever as developments in digital publishing and distribution have removed costs traditionally associated with print journalism.

The only thing left to pay for is the journalism itself. Figuring that out, for ourselves, is the only route to independence. And independence is more important than ever.

IN *PHILANTHROPY IN AMERICA: A History*, due out this month and likely to become a landmark text, Olivier Zunz, an academic at the University of Virginia, argues that American government has long been shadowed by two kinds of private philanthropy. One is mass philanthropic effort (the "Big Wind," as H. L. Mencken's *American Mercury* put it in 1928, when the tax code evolved in such a way as to save the middle class significant tax burdens if they made charitable donations; "Viewers Like You!" is the current parlance). Another is philanthropy from elites (*American Mercury's* "Big Money Boys," now recognizable in end credits listing the likes of the Helena Rubinstein Foundation).

Zunz explains that the very creation of both these classes of philanthropy required significant government interference with the tax code, a process that

evolved over decades, and which Zunz profiles with diligence and nuance. In other words, philanthropy's independence from government interference required government action, to loosen restrictions on the disposal of private money for charitable causes.

What's more, government has continually sought to create its own firewall between private moneyed interests, philanthropic and otherwise, and the spheres of activity that rightly belonged to the state, lest unelected interests have control of the basic functions of practiced democratic government. From the very earliest changes in the tax code to allow charitable organizations to operate without serious tax burdens, a distinction was made between "education" and "advocacy." The latter, Zunz writes, was considered a dangerous counterpoint to actual government; the former was a form of free speech. Diligence was required to keep the line from blurring.

Consider the case of Margaret Sanger, the path-breaking advocate of birth-control education, who in 1921 founded what would become Planned Parenthood. In her time, pamphlets on birth control were still subject to Victorian-era anti-obscenity laws. Sanger and her allies fought for the right to distribute them anyway, and won. But a court rejected the argument that the distribution of the pamphlets was a charity that qualified for tax exemption. Zunz writes: "They were unable to change Treasury's position that the state could not subsidize challenges to existing law, regardless of the flaws of that law.

"No issue," Zunz writes, "came closer to embodying all the difficulties inherent in attempts to define the proper

RICH PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT NEWS ENOUGH TO PAY FOR IT: WE COULD FIND MORE OF THEM!



nature of philanthropic causes and the limits on philanthropic action and its interaction with democratic politics."

One reason this is relevant here is the importance of the independence of the press from government or private-interest interference.

"There were three estates in Parliament," Edmund Burke is said to have exclaimed in 1787, "but, in the Reporters' Gallery yonder there sat a fourth estate more important far than they all."

Americans know in their bones that the independence of that fourth estate is to be guarded. We've seen how work in the public realm that is funded entirely or in part by government subsidy comes under intense scrutiny for perceived bias to the left or right. The culture war of the 1980s that embroiled the National Endowment for the Arts is an example. Or the battles over public broadcasting after the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, created by an act of Congress in the Johnson administration, got into the act. Things only got worse as public broadcasters like PBS and NPR aired reports and documentaries on civil rights, the Vietnam War, and the general cultural revolution taking place in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Then there is the pressure of private money. Zunz provides reminders of the history of philanthropy in advancing particular causes. In 1945, he notes, Pennsylvania oilman J. Howard Pew, who had been looking for a way to counter what he considered philanthropy's broad, irreligious, and even communist views, threw charitable support behind *Guideposts*, the magazine of Norman Vincent Peale, pastor of the Fifth Avenue Marble Collegiate Church. "All we need to do is state our case," Peale told Pew, and "keep driving it home. It will win its own way, I am sure, because it is the truth." Pew avidly supported McCarthyism, as well as Tennessee Congressman B. Carroll Reece's 1953 investigations into whether large philanthropic organizations were supporting "efforts to overthrow our government and to undermine our American way of life."

Philanthropists give money to advance causes. The press is not the same sort of cause as poverty or malnutrition, or education or aid to immigrants. It is, after all, the medium through which

information about precisely the issues philanthropy has traditionally addressed is broadcast to the public.

Of course, the press has always had owners—wealthy families or big corporations—that have pushed the journalism in certain directions. Whether news outlets can guarantee their independence any better with a large for-profit corporate owner than with major nonprofit funders remains to be seen. But one recent and controversial report found that nonprofit news organizations already have a mixed record when it comes to being objective and transparent about the sources of their support.

Published in July 2011 by the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, the study found:

The 46 national and state-level news sites examined—a group that included seven new commercial sites with similar missions—offered a wide range of styles and approaches, but roughly half, the study found, produced news coverage that was clearly ideological in nature.

In general, the more ideological sites tended to be funded mostly or entirely by one parent organization—though that parent group may have various contributors.

On the other hand, the study found that sites that had a broad base of support—a larger number of smaller funders—were more likely to produce journalism as the traditional nonpartisan mission would have it:

Sites that offered a mixed or balanced political perspective, on the other hand, tended to have multiple funders, more revenue streams, more transparency and more content with a deeper bench of reporters. The six most transparent sites studied, for instance, were among the most balanced in the news they produced.

Or as media critic Jack Shafer put it in a column on *Slate* in September 2009, "No matter how good the nonprofit operation is, it always ends up sustaining itself with handouts, and handouts come with conditions."

The bigger the handout, the more onerous the conditions. Laura Frank, director of the nonprofit Rocky Mountain

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Jenny Mangelsdorf

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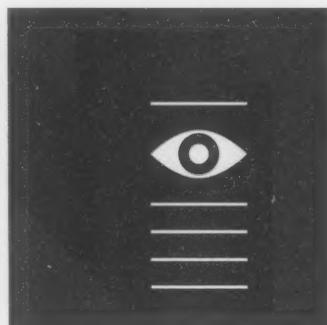
The awards, given by Long Island University for excellence in journalism, are primarily for investigative work. They cover news stories in print and online and photographs and radio and television broadcasts. Entries must include two original clips or recordings (with two copies of printed text plus URLs for digital submissions). They should come with an explanatory letter and be postmarked no later than January 6, 2012.

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Investigative News Network, last September told the *American Journalism Review*: "People think, 'Oh, wow. You don't have to deal with advertisers,' but it's kind of the same thing. Foundations are used to funding something and having control over it. You have to explain to them that there is a firewall: 'What you're funding is the act of journalism for the benefit of society.'

There is, of course, a great debate over whether the kind of standardized objective journalism that took hold with the professionalization of the craft in the latter half of the last century still serves the public. A press that advocates positions on issues is not inherently problematic. The question is whether the advocacy is pursued independently of funding interests; that's the distinction that Frank finds she must constantly strive to make her funders understand.

Advocacy as an editorial priority or point of view is essential to a healthy, diverse press culture. Without it, there's no *Nation*, no *Weekly Standard*, no *New Criterion*, no *Dissent*, to name a few outlets with radically different structures but with independent editorial missions.

Advocacy as a funding mechanism is what I find problematic, especially as new big-money power bases emerge for solving the problems that society encounters. Everyone takes for granted the need to be a news organization that is independent of Washington. But how long before it becomes just as important to be independent of, say, tech billionaires out of Cupertino, or Mountain View, or Redmond?

Building a "philanthropy firewall" is just as daunting as any advertising firewall ever was. Yet contemplating a nonprofit model does not necessarily mean hunting great personal or corporate fortunes. Broad appeals to the middle class have long been a part of American philanthropic practice.

But broad appeals need a broad base, and, therefore, scale. Most journalism will not be able to reach that scale quickly, without large private disbursements from a small number of deep pockets. The next NPR or PBS will not just drop out of the sky without some boldface name from the financial pages creating it. That strikes me as perilous.

BUILDING A BUSINESS, AS RISKY AS IT sounds, at least builds value that belongs to the organization. It can be difficult, and slow. Today's apparent success stories are often small regional startups that have generally been patient about scaling up. Such sites may not comfort those who want to see three or four more news organizations with the strength and reach of now-fading quality regional dailies, like *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Los Angeles Times*, or the *Chicago Tribune*. But it's worth remembering that these papers, in a different era, themselves grew organically over time from local dailies to large operations, according to market conditions.

In other words, I tend to think the tortoise in this race is journalism produced by individuals willing to endure extremely small budgets to build an audience and revenue streams over time, independent of agenda-driven charitable organizations and deep-pocketed vanity publishers. Some well-endowed nonprofits see things differently; there admittedly is a divide among nonprofit journalism organizations about scale.

But the nonprofit journalism outfits that spend big bucks can't go on forever, can they? I don't think the large nonprofit journalism entities coming into being these days are the future, and I don't think that's a bad thing.

In his conclusion, Zunz elevates the importance not of big donors, but of many small ones. "If there is a lesson from the history I have told," Zunz concludes, "it is that philanthropy enlarges democracy when it is an activity in which the many participate."

The same, I think, will be true of the journalism, whether for-profit or nonprofit, that emerges in the next half century. Lean operations of committed journalists, fiercely protective of their independence and eager for commercial success—but flexible in their planning and patient for growth—will create the next generation of quality journalism. You haven't heard of very many of them yet, but you will. **CJR**

TOM McGEVERAN is a co-founder and editor of *Capital New York*, a for-profit news and commentary site that recently raised \$1.7 million from private investors. He previously was editor of *The New York Observer*.

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FROM THE FAMILY OF
LOUIS G. COWAN

What Can I Build Today?

Online startups can win the future by staying in the present

BY MICHAEL MEYER

THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ONLINE NEWS STARTUPS IN America, but only about five that media observers discuss with any frequency. The names will be familiar: Voice of San Diego, The Texas Tribune, MinnPost, the Chicago News Cooperative, The Bay Citizen. All are well-funded, big-city nonprofits backed by large foundations and staffed by veteran journalists. In other words, thinking of them as providing a glimpse into the future of local journalism is a bit like saying NASA shows a way forward to municipal space programs.

It's not that the Big Five aren't worthy of attention. Each provides hard news where it is desperately needed, and each is experimenting in fruitful ways with how to fund local news without big-league philanthropy. If and when these experiments pay off, smaller news organizations can adapt them to their own circumstances.

I suspect, though, that the primary reason these organizations are discussed so frequently is that their success validates a deeply held optimism that many feel about the web's ability to sustain local news. It's an optimism based more on faith than reality, and the Big Five are the cherry-picked slices of reality that anchor that faith. Their existence contributes to a vague sense of hopefulness among practitioners of local online journalism.

Most founders of local online news operations I talk to are simultaneously optimistic about the future and frustrated by the present. They have a strong sense that building a digital news source for their communities puts them on the right side of history, but little concept of how to keep their operation afloat long enough to be vindicated. Longing for a (hopefully) not-too-distant future when everything scary about the world of journalism economics becomes somehow less so, they too often neglect to engage present financial challenges in order to press forward confidently with their journalistic vision. The result is a field full of promising journalistic institutions with anemic and at times nearly nonexistent business models. Ironically, the future might look a lot brighter if news startups shed their futurism and instead ask: What can I build today?

LAST JANUARY, CJR STARTED A PROJECT CALLED THE NEWS FRONTIER DATABASE, with the goal of building a comprehensive resource on the editorial and business practices of digital news startups. Each entry includes a profile and a data set with information on revenue sources, staffing levels, coverage areas, and other particulars of the news site. We've profiled more than two hundred sites so far. About fifty of these are national in scope and the rest provide state and local coverage.

The vast majority of journalism startups cover local news, and, considering

the diminished quality of local news in recent years, this makes sense. The organizations themselves vary greatly, from large nonprofits like the Big Five to for-profits backed by venture capital to sites run by a lone journalist. Depending on how narrowly one defines journalism, there are either many hundreds or many thousands of these startups.

Online local news sites struggle with the same economic environment as the rest of the media industry, but with the additional challenges of a small audience base, a reliance on financing from local foundations with unstable endowments, and a need to convince cautious small-business owners to embrace online advertising. Not surprisingly, then, the local news startup world is marked by an extreme lack of resources. A large majority of the local sites we've profiled have fewer than six editorial employees and fewer than three business employees; more than a third have no business staff at all, relying on someone from editorial to also run the business operation.

As a result, business strategies are frequently incoherent. Some sites operate in a manner indistinguishable from a freelancer scrambling for his next assignment. It will take a few more years before we have hard data on the average life span of the sites we're following, but current indicators are not promising. We once assigned a reporter to profile a startup, only to discover it had gone out of business during the couple of days it took to file the piece.

In other words, no one is getting rich off of online local news. The important distinction to draw, then, is not between sites that are profitable (or sustainable as nonprofits) and those that are not, but between sites that live for the present—attempting every day to sustain their operations through a rigorous and reasoned response to their local market—and those that live for the future—dabbling in revenue-generation but pinning their hopes on a more favorable online news environment that doesn't currently exist, and may never exist.

Startups that live for the present have a few key characteristics. More often than not, they have an employee with business experience—which means they have revenue projections and five-year plans and realistic fundraising targets.

Their attempts at revenue generation are usually highly labor intensive—and would thus be out of reach for most sites that do not have a dedicated business employee. These include high-volume, direct-sale advertising; constant fund-raising; and offering non-journalistic services such as social-media training for local businesses.

Sites that live for the future are no more or less committed to journalism than sites that live for the present—they're just less likely to be able to practice journalism for very long. Journalists founded the majority of these sites, often under the assumption that they could juggle both editorial and business responsibilities. Once the site is up and running, they find that the demands of the editorial operation are more than enough to keep them busy. They neglect their present environment and instead hope that the value of their work will lead to staying power—a fallacy that might sound familiar to many newspaper publishers. Sadly, the startups with hopes most pinned on this faith that good work will be rewarded monetarily are often the ones in underserved media markets. They rushed to fill a news vacuum and now find themselves in a void of a different kind.

ONE OF THE MOST COMMON CRITICISMS we receive of our work on The News Frontier Database is that we define news organizations by the standards of the past. Is it necessary to pay so much attention to conglomerations of reporters and editors who publish news items alongside display advertising? Should we, as Clay Shirky suggested, devote our attention to entities such as WikiLeaks that have no clear antecedent, or to promising phenomena like the NPR social-media strategist Andy Carvin's Twitter account, which he has turned into a sort of twenty-first century news wire? Does the next best hope of journalism lie in something not yet possible or even conceivable on the local level?

The types of organizations we're documenting are undeniably an intermediate step. For that very reason, it's crucial to study them. The low entry barrier for news startups provided by the Internet means that they are going to be part of local journalism for the foreseeable future.

Some of the most impressive startups aren't particularly 'innovative.'

And the best of them (even the ones that will die once their editors exhaust their savings accounts) are providing vital information to their communities. This is why the people who run them need to trade their optimism about the future for a hard plunge into the present.

Some of the most impressive startups I've encountered aren't particularly innovative—not in the way I usually think of the word. Innovative, to me, is an artist who died fifty years before his heirs ever sold a painting. If journalists are going to venerate innovation, we need a more helpful understanding of the term.

News startups might be more successful if they thought of innovation not as a race to be the first around the next curve, but as a creative response to their present environment. The Big Five are innovative in this sense. They haven't invented something radically different. Instead, they seized an opportunity given them by declining newspapers in their respective markets, and managed to convince foundations concerned about the future of news that they were the best near-term solution to the problem.

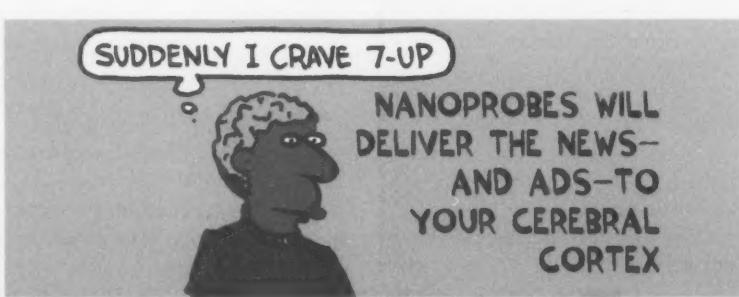
Thinking of innovation this way also broadens the conversation about web news. For example, I've encountered several thriving local news startups that have print products, but they're not at all backward in their thinking. This Land Press, perhaps Oklahoma's first new-

media company, produces beautiful video journalism and an equally stunning broadsheet that turns print from stale to exclusive. The website is free, the paper is not, and ads are sold across both mediums. Weld, a new site in Birmingham, Alabama, breaks city politics stories on Twitter that evolve into blog posts before becoming context-filled news articles for their alt-weekly-style print product. These startups innovated by coming up with the right blend of old and new for their respective markets.

Defining innovation as a reaction to the present might also help some of the troubled startups I mentioned above kick their bad habits. Lastly, and this is crucial, thinking of innovation in this way allows us to talk more realistically about failure. One thing I'm bemused and saddened by in the online news world is the excitement that heralds every new launch or trend, and the scorn that follows every failure. Could this be because we're obsessed with an unrealistic conception of innovation, one which dictates that everything unprecedented is good and everything unsuccessful is un-innovative?

The news innovators most worthy of attention aren't those who have reached some platonic ideal of web journalism, but rather are the ones who have spent a good year, or a good decade, working every day to produce journalism and sustain it. This engagement with the present doesn't guarantee success, but it will provide some useful lessons to those of us who pay attention. And at least those that don't survive will have died with their boots on, having taken a few more intermediary steps. **CJR**

MICHAEL MEYER is a CJR staff writer who also runs The News Frontier Database on CJR.org.



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Books nominations must be submitted by publishers.

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Submissions are being taken now for the 2012 Gomory Prize for books or articles published in 2010 or 2011. For more information on submitting an article or book, please visit www.theBHC.org.



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What About Modesto?

The digital-news parade threatens to pass some communities by



ADRIAN MENDOZA

In Modesto, California, the need for news far exceeds the current supply. A city of 200,000 with one midsized newspaper, a large Hispanic population, 16 percent unemployment, and the second-highest rate of car theft in the nation, Modesto lies just ninety-two miles east of San Francisco. But the spirit of news experimentation that pervades the Bay Area hasn't crossed the Coastal Range.

There are plenty of places like Modesto—small cities and towns with neither the demographics to attract outside news entrepreneurs nor the resources to develop their own. Their residents, generally less educated and less wired than their counterparts in major urban areas, continue to rely on legacy media. But many of those outlets are shrinking into insignificance, and it's unclear what will take their place.

It's easy to identify and praise promising news experiments; it's harder to imagine the future of those places where bandwagons never go. If the digital-news revolution is to truly serve a mass audience, beyond educated and reasonably affluent urbanites, we must account for Modesto; we must find ways for innovation to flourish in poor towns where, for so long, it has been allowed to die.

CJR asked five people who know Modesto well to reflect on the future of news and information there, and in communities like it. (For more of this discussion, go to cjr.org/behind_the_news/modesto.php.)

A Paperless Bee

Making the future online

BY RUSTY COATS

IN 1993, I WAS DRIVING HOME TO Modesto after covering a Bay Area conference on cryptography, having spent the past fourteen hours with hackers, phone phreaks, and other libertines who inhabited the pre-web text warren called the Internet. My head buzzed with encryption algorithms, social engineering schemes, and visions of an emerging digital frontier as I crested the Coastal Range.

It was past midnight, mid-winter, and as my headlights bore down on the Central Valley, I saw the familiar and treacherous soup below. The Valley—a giant basin ringed by mountains—fills with tule fog in the winter. The ground fog can cut visibility to zero, kills more Californians than any other weather phenomenon, and tastes faintly of ozone. It is a blanket that shrouds everything.

And as I descended into the fog, thoughts of a digital frontier disappeared. The innovation of the conference was far away. It never made it past the mountains.

It was a pattern I repeated dozens of times. I covered technology for *The Modesto Bee*, syndicated by McClatchy News Service, and made multiple trips to the Bay Area to write about online innovation long before there was a dot-com bubble.

My editors indulged me, no two ways about it. What I covered had little to do with local readers—at least, not in the present tense. While Modesto rode the housing boom of the late eighties, claiming to be a bedroom community of the Bay Area, the city was never far from its Dust Bowl-refugee roots. My investigative reporting on homelessness, runaway teenagers, and methamphetamine was certainly more native.

But eighteen months later, after the Mosaic browser began leaking out of Illinois at five thousand downloads a month and dial-up speeds crossed fifty-six kilobits per second, I remember sitting in a cramped office at California

State University, Stanislaus. A cognitive-theory professor who looked like Gandalf showed me a web browser for the first time. And something clicked.

It could come here, too.

Online activity was about to explode. Information was going to shed its geographic moorings. And while most people's Internet experiences were still defined by Yahoo's hierarchical link trees (or AOL's Cops Who Flirt III chatrooms), it was clear that newspapers had a tremendous opportunity.

So I became a burr in the side of Orage Quarles III, publisher of the *Bee*. "We need to go online!" I'd wheedle. "Every day we wait, we risk our franchise!"

Quarles pushed the onus back to me. He assigned me to lead a task force to craft a proposal for taking the *Bee* online. At the time, only ten thousand residents in Stanislaus County had Internet access, but our proposal—delivered February 26, 1996—said we must think long-term: "We have the opportunity—perhaps for the first time—to become more essential to our readers and our community.... The Internet is a global phenomenon, yet its potential, ironically, is local."

Weeks later, Quarles named me online news manager and directed me to get the paper online in six weeks. (He'd heard that *The Sacramento Bee*, McClatchy's flagship, was going online in seven. This is how publishers think.) I didn't know HTML or any other programming languages beyond Excel macros learned at computer-assisted reporting seminars. Quarles gave me no staff but encouraged me to beg services from anyone in the building. He was emphatic that he wanted it to be very, very good.

In six weeks.

I said sure.

Six weeks later, *modbee.com* went live at 12:01 a.m. on June 4, 1996 with news, multimedia reports of Yosemite, community resources, and a winking image of Scoopy, our bee mascot. It was the first *Bee* online but trailed others in McClatchy, particularly the newly acquired *Raleigh News & Observer* and its *Nando.net* (which was the CNN of the web before CNN was on the web). But it was the first in the Central Valley. It had come here, too. It had crested the mountains. Because we'd made it happen.

Fifteen years later, *The Modesto Bee* has changed considerably, a microcosm of the newspaper industry. Buyouts and layoffs have trimmed the workforce by hundreds. The newspaper is printed in Sacramento. The building—new and state-of-the-art when I was hired in 1989—has been sold recently.

As anyone working in newspapers will point out, Modesto isn't unique. The digital wave that crested the Coastal Range changed our economy in ways even the most gifted futurists couldn't predict. Traditional business models have been obliterated. Newspapers, caught trying to maintain a legacy business while building an interactive one, have been strategic whipsaws, unable to commit fully to a paperless future that is, let's face it, inevitable.

Since I left Modesto in 1998, I've held senior digital positions at four newspapers, two corporate digital positions, and now run a consultancy focused on media that is participatory, mobile, and sustainable. Our clients range from tablet app developers to foundations to news entrepreneurs. And that blend has helped us glimpse what lies ahead.

IN THE NOT-SO-DISTANT
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RUSTY COATS is president of the consultancy CoatsCoats, and has worked in newspapers and interactive media for twenty-five years.

TED RALL

Fledgling news websites have cropped up across the country, led by journalists who bleed local, sometimes down to the neighborhood. Foundations that historically funded online news gadgetry are focusing on business models—and the coming nexus of for-profit, nonprofit, and technological partnerships. News entrepreneurs are building lean, adaptive organizations that face the future with a startup mentality rather than a bunker mentality. Successful media sales organizations are becoming agencies selling across multiple brands and products. And mobile consumption of information borders on ubiquity.

Put all of this together and you have the DNA of a successful twenty-first century community newspaper—without the paper.

The Modesto Bee, sitting at the center of a prehistoric sea, has been washed over by the digital tsunami. What remains—and where it goes from here—depends on its ability to see over the next crest.

available digital content. According to my data, aside from age, socioeconomic class is the key determinant of one's likelihood to engage in activities such as blogging, social networking, or posting to video sites. So online access and activity are far less common in a rural area, like Modesto, than ninety miles away in San Francisco, a more urban setting with a bounty of innovative journalism.

Indeed, one can find few local Modesto blogs, news startups, or foundation-backed nonprofits stepping into the breach. And given the demographics of the region, and the role those demographics play in determining who is likely to participate online, it's unlikely that these sorts of projects will appear organically.

To understand why, it is essential to study what I call the digital-production gap: the poor and working class in America, of which Modesto has more than its share, are not as likely to create online content as those from the middle to upper classes.

I have researched online content production using statistical analyses of almost a decade's worth of Pew Research Center data. I examined the factors affecting participation in ten common online activities—from blogging to social networking, from video to photo posts. I found that the production barrier isn't simply a question of access to the Internet. My analysis included everyone from the data, even people not online, who are often omitted from published reports on digital engagement. However, even among people who are online, a significant class gap exists across all online activities, even accounting for other demographic factors.

Do race and ethnicity explain the gap—especially in a town like Modesto, where 35.5 percent of the population is Hispanic (compared to 16.3 percent of the total US population)? Not really. Hispanics are less likely to have Internet access than non-Hispanics; but among those who are online, neither ethnicity nor race accounts for the production gap.

Instead, the low rate of citizen journalists in a city like Modesto is related to the low levels of education and income among a significant proportion of its residents. For one thing, a limited income can reduce access to an array of digital

Class Struggle

Tech won't end the digital divide

BY JEN SCHRADIE

LIKE MANY AMERICAN CITIES, MODESTO has been decimated by local media layoffs and cutbacks in recent years. Journalists have more responsibilities than ever, and so they've come to rely on Twitter, Facebook, local blogs, and Google as vital parts of their news-gathering efforts. Before this digital shift, journalists too often under-reported, stereotyped, and misrepresented poor and working class Americans. Now, social media allows a broader array of citizens to participate in the creation and distribution of local news. Do these new platforms help marginalized voices represent themselves better in the media?

Not really. Over the past five years, I've been researching the barriers and divides of who is producing publicly

JEN SCHRADIE is a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of California, Berkeley and is affiliated with the Berkeley Center for New Media.

Modesto, California

Population

201,165

Eighteenth-largest city in California; 107th-largest city in the US, between Des Moines, Iowa, and Fayetteville, North Carolina

Location



Race and ethnicity

65% white
35.5% Hispanic
6.7% Asian
4.2% African American

Median household income

\$47,983

Major employers

Stanislaus County, E&J Gallo Winery, Modesto City Schools, Foster Farms, Seneca Foods, Del Monte Foods

Unemployment rate

16%

One of the 25 most polluted cities in the US

Number two in car thefts per 100,000 people

In 2010, Modesto's metropolitan area ranked **161 of the 162** listed in the **Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index**, just above that of Huntington, West Virginia

13.2% of Modesto households earned less than \$15,000 in 2010, above both the California and national averages

2.7% earned more than \$200,000, below both the state and national averages

City motto

Water Wealth Contentment Health

Notable former residents

Chandra Levy, George Lucas, Mark Spitz, Scott Peterson, Jeremy Renner

Sources: US Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Insurance Crime Bureau, American Lung Association

tools and production gadgets. In other words, owning a smartphone, a desktop, and/or a laptop—and having access to these digital tools at home and at work—matters. Public library access or school-based computers are a start, but they're not enough to close the gap. In another study, I interviewed and observed library patrons who relied on public computers. They reported having to take multiple buses or walk a great distance for their one-hour computer allowance during the few days per week that the library was even open. They spent their time online applying for jobs, writing résumés, or doing school work, rather than production activities like citizen journalism.

In addition, Internet users with a college education are twice as likely as their high school-educated counterparts to post videos and photos online. Also, bloggers are one and a half times more likely to have a college degree than just a high school diploma. Digital skills training is a tempting remedy for the education gap—but it fails to account for the new gadgets and applications that are always on the horizon, leaving people on a treadmill trying to catch up.

How, then, can low-income people in cities like Modesto become active producers of media rather than passive consumers of others' attempts to cover them (or the lack thereof)?

It is not simply a question of improving rural broadband access, or importing technological solutions from the digital riches of Silicon Valley to the poverty of the Central Valley. The digital production gap transcends geography and stopgap measures.

Expanding broadband access, particularly in rural areas, is an appealing

answer to digital production inequality. Surprisingly, while high-speed Internet access is important for being an Internet consumer, it is not important for being a producer. At the same time, living in an urban area contributes to consumption of online content, while having little bearing on production. What ultimately matters is class.

And it is the working class that has lost the most during this transformation of the news media. Not only does coverage of their world suffer like that of other constituencies in an era of reduced investigative reporting, but they are also not as apt to contribute to the new citizen journalism cloud.

Any solution to this gap must address the fundamental socioeconomic gaps between digital haves and have-nots. The ability of a city like Modesto to engage more of its citizens online may well rest on its ability to confront this thorny topic. Otherwise, the more elite classes that dominate the cloud will continue to drown out the voices of the marginalized.

purpose they need to keep coming to school each day. Along the way, they're developing a sharper focus on the world outside Modesto—and the hidden world inside Modesto, too.

Cut to the fall of 2011. The newsroom is now a tutoring center. *The Pirates' Log*, which MJC students had published continuously since 1926, is no more. The last online edition is a stale cyber-ghost. The student radio station is silent. The state-of-the-art TV department has been taken over by the administration and used to make marketing videos.

I was that journalist, hired in 1996 to teach students the essentials of journalism. For fifteen years I tried to train them to ask deeper questions; to seek answers; to value teamwork, tenacity, and technique; and above all to lift their gaze from the flat, hazy terrain of California's Central Valley. Then, last spring, faced with a potential \$8 million budget shortfall, the college eliminated the journalism, radio, film, and television programs, along with all student media, without so much as a backward glance of regret.

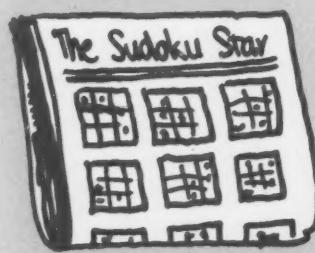
This scenario tells you everything you need to know about a community which, in its isolation from any real sense of the new-media renaissance, fell victim to the banal contempt for journalism so prevalent in mainstream America today. In a region where corporate media outlets have shrunk to the point that most residents simply ignore them, college administrators made a facile case that student media were a luxury they couldn't afford. They must have realized what was at stake: the proven value of journalism studies in promoting media literacy, civic engagement, and awareness of the wider world. They just didn't think it was worth fighting for.

School's Out

A lost generation of journalists

BY LAURA PAULL

A JOURNALIST WALKS ACROSS THE Modesto Junior College campus in the mid-1990s and peeks in the newspaper office, where dedicated students ankle-deep in gluey paper strips are laying out eight broadsheet pages, scissors and pencils in hands. Though their backgrounds vary, they have each discovered in the task of producing a newspaper the



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LAURA PAULL is editor for citizen journalism and a contributing writer for *The Huffington Post*. She lives in San Francisco.

TED RALL

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but it might as well be Al Jazeera given how few people listen to it.

Both progressives and conservatives criticize Modesto's one newspaper, the *Bee*, for opposite reasons, and its readership has dwindled like that of most American newspapers. The region's few independent online publishing ventures have pushed music, lifestyle, and entertainment content, not compelling news or intelligent discussion of current events.

And yet. The popularity of MJC media classes swelled in the years before the cuts. Though lacking exposure to quality models of media, whether print, broadcast, or online, students still flocked to these familiar formats. And those who stayed to join the newspaper staff eventually discovered that the practice of daily journalism, on a college campus or in the real world, is nothing less than a commitment to find, share, and protect the truth in the interest of democracy. That's an ennobling validation for a Central Valley kid.

So you can imagine how they felt when the newly hired president of the college, Gaither Loewenstein, proposed taking it all away. Journalism as we knew it was obsolete, he argued, nowhere near as relevant to today's world as computer graphics and video games. "In light of resource limitations," he wrote, "MJC must focus on maintaining its strength in the core disciplines of art, music, and theatre, which will provide students with the creative skill sets they need to apply their talents in the age of new media. In the absence of actual talent and fundamental training in these disciplines, the entertainment and information industries must

be reduced to sophisticated mechanisms for delivering mediocre content."

Loewenstein's argument stunned media students and faculty all over the state. This was not an analysis of why much contemporary media is mediocre and how students should be trained in order to improve it. It was a baseless assertion that what today's media professionals were producing didn't require any training specific to the field. Maybe the news media didn't need to exist at all, he seemed to say. Entertainment had taken over, and would suffice.

Students reacted to this news with tears and rage—and, for the rest of the semester, they went for broke in the exercise of their First Amendment rights.

"How dare you tell us that our hard work is 'mediocre'... and how dare you cut our voices short because you don't wish for us to speak," wrote Dani Porter, a *Log* columnist and journalism major.

Dawn Burns, also a journalism major, called Loewenstein's proposal "demeaning and offensive." "I know I have talent. It may be raw and it may not be up to the standard of someone on *The New York Times*, but that is what I am here for!"

In March 2011, more than a thousand people packed the college auditorium to argue against the cuts. But a frightened board of trustees, worried about the bottom line, rubber-stamped the Loewenstein decree. There were other cuts, too. Journalism was nothing special.

LESS THAN A MONTH AFTER THE DEmise of media education in Modesto, I walked into the offices of The Huffington Post in New York and saw some 250 young writers, editors, and technicians working. I had begun a new career as an

editor on the site's OfftheBus 2012 platform for citizen journalism. Everyone can and should do journalism of some sort, is the mantra. It's not only a First Amendment right, but a First Amendment responsibility.

Back in Modesto, some media students are trying to carry on—as they should. Sidelined by academia, they've formed a club called Underground Media. Three holdouts from the former *Log* staff are talking about publishing online or as a smartphone app. I suggested a name for the new "newspaper": *The Skeleton Crew*. But they haven't published anything yet. One young writer told me that he was struggling with his story; that he didn't know whom to question, or what, exactly, to ask.

I worry about their loss of career training. I question whether this generation will be able to perform the vital functions of a free press. But I also worry about whether people in places remote from the vibrant centers of the new media even know that media careers are still possible. Or that journalists, alongside citizens of all kinds, are reinventing the media and refusing to disappear, buoyed by the possibilities of the Internet and the climactic crises of our times.

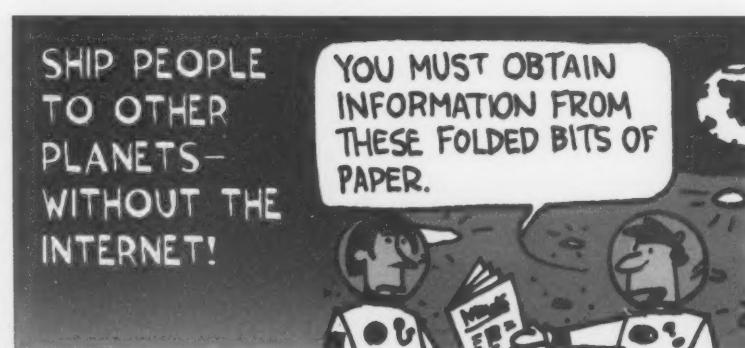
Plowing Ahead

A farm newspaper's future

BY KRISTIN PLATTS

AGRICULTURE IS AND ALWAYS HAS BEEN the backbone of the California economy. Last year, Stanislaus County exported agriculture products to eighty-five countries and brought in a farm gate value of \$2.6 billion. With so much of the state's economy relying on Central Valley farmers, it's a shame that many residents still do not grasp agriculture's importance.

The public disconnect from agriculture isn't hard to understand. In our county, jobless rates hover at 16 percent; the poverty rate is nearly 20 percent; widespread methamphetamine use drives theft; and gang-related homicides are increasingly common. The public simply



KRISTIN PLATTS is the editor of the Stanislaus County Farm News, in Modesto, California.

has other things to think about—and the news media have other things to cover.

The *Modesto Bee* has always done a good job of covering agricultural issues. But the *Bee*, like many other newspapers its size, has been forced to make choices that affect the depth and the breadth of its coverage. There's no guarantee that agricultural coverage will remain a top priority for the paper. If agricultural news is to remain strong in the Modesto region, other outlets might have to fill in the gaps.

The Stanislaus County Farm Bureau has advocated for farmers for nearly ninety-five years. It has long attempted to bring ag news to the public through its weekly newspaper, *The Stanislaus Farm News*, which I edit. It is the nation's only weekly farm bureau newspaper. We also publish thirteen special editions each year, giving in-depth coverage to topics affecting specific commodities—dairy, nuts, nursery, poultry, wine grapes, and many more.

The *Farm News* averages twelve to sixteen pages a week, and has just one full-time employee and two part-time employees. Unfortunately, because the *Farm News* is a print-only publication that's distributed exclusively to bureau members, it's likely that the paper mostly preaches to the choir. Although we have discussed ways to get some of what we publish on the farm bureau's website, that hasn't happened.

One can imagine a future in which the *Farm News* expands its online presence to compensate for reduced agriculture coverage across the region. Nonprofit organizations in other places have hired reporters and bloggers to cover specialty issues that might otherwise be ignored.

We'd need a larger staff to make it happen, though, and since Modesto Junior College has eliminated its journalism program, it may be harder to find qualified young hires. In the past, the *Farm News* has found reporting interns at the junior college. There's no shortage of bright students who have shown an interest in farm bureau internships, but experience has shown that they need good classroom training to succeed at the job. While the junior college has a nationally acclaimed agriculture program, the pool of knowledgeable student writers looks thin.

That said, there is perhaps room for

others to pick up the slack. Over the last few years, social networking has spawned a new way for those in the ag industry to get their news and, in a way, act as citizen journalists. Organizations like the AgChat Foundation use Twitter and Facebook to engage farmers nationwide in daily conversations about the issues affecting agriculture, and empower those farmers to connect with their communities. Most of the people participating in these forums aren't trained journalists, but they can certainly play a role in raising and maintaining public awareness of key agricultural issues, and bringing those issues to the attention of journalists who can turn them into stories.

The future of where and how we'll continue to obtain our news is, obviously, uncertain. But it's probable that specialty news will come from a variety of small, expert sources, rather than from one major outlet. I believe farmers and ranchers in and around Modesto will continue to be proactive in sharing their knowledge and insight with the public. I also believe the old-time farmer mindset is shifting to a more modern way of thinking. They really don't have any other choice.

Just Press On

Templates for Anytown, USA

BY MICHAEL STOLL

NIC ROETHLISBERGER AND DHYANA Levey now live in the foggy Richmond District of San Francisco, flanked by the Pacific Ocean and the Golden Gate. The couple spent the mid-2000s in and around Modesto—Nic as a copy editor at *The Modesto Bee* and Dhyana as an environmental reporter for the *Merced Sun-Star* and the *Sonora Union Democrat*. In 2008 they gave up on the Central Valley to return to San Francisco, where both had gone to college, for better work and school opportunities. The contrast in media, they said, was stark.

"Modesto is a different universe," Roethlisberger says. "The Bee is pretty

MICHAEL STOLL is the executive editor of the San Francisco Public Press (www.sfpublicpress.org), a nonprofit news website and ad-free quarterly newspaper founded in 2009.

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much the only professional news organization covering the city. That's it. In San Francisco you have the *Chronicle* and *Examiner* and umpteen wire services. That just doesn't happen in Modesto. There are some very good reporters there, but not too many of them. You can count the number of news reporters who cover Modesto on two hands."

Levey covered satellite communities outside Modesto. She says several small cities that used to have a full-time reporter now only get written about two or three times a week.

Neither is sanguine about the future of the professional reporting that mid-sized cities had in the last century. At *The Modesto Bee* and other McClatchy-owned papers in the region, Roethlisberger says, the few journalists often don't know what they don't know. "If you're sitting around Thursday afternoon and think, 'Well, can we hold this for after the weekend,' you're more likely to do that if you know there's no competition. You can get lackadaisical."

The contraction of the press in places like Modesto does represent an opportunity.

is to create models that can work in more than one place. In fact, our noncommercial print newspaper model might actually be a better fit for Modesto than for San Francisco. As a membership organization supported by readers and not advertisers, it would be insulated from the economic ebb tide that has hit the Central Valley particularly hard.

Ideally, templates like the *Public Press* could work in nearly any community. But if we have learned anything, it's that a startup's success is dependent on lining up sufficient resources ahead of time from civic-minded people and organizations. The editor and publisher would have to be local. Key supporters could be found among groups like the Rotary, the League of Women Voters, and supporters of the public library. With luck, local philanthropists could then be persuaded that accountability journalism should no longer be left only to the whims of the market.

Whatever model is used—ad-based or noncommercial, private or nonprofit, advocacy or straight down the middle—some of the revenue needs to be earned. We sell our papers for a dollar, syndicate our reporting, and engage in public broadcasting-style membership drives. It's no way to get rich, but as a nonprofit, all we have to do is break even.

Roethlisberger says perhaps the best chance for Modesto would be the arrival of AOL's Patch.com model of networked small-town blogs. But he worries that Modesto doesn't have the advertising base to keep even that going.

But the press's contraction in cities like Modesto does represent an opportunity for new entities to sprout and take hold. It would be fascinating to see a major foundation or journalism organization hold a conference there to get the best brains in a room and dream up ways to get this done. **CJR**

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On Facebook and Freedom

Why journalists should not surrender to the Walmarts of the web

BY JUSTIN PETERS

IN SEPTEMBER OF THIS YEAR, THE INTERNET BRIEFLY BURBLED WITH THE NEWS that Facebook, the market leader in workday-wastery, would soon debut several fundamental changes to its site. For some of the more excitable online pundits, this was akin to the discovery of a heretofore-unnoticed ocean, and as the date of the redesign drew closer, they devolved into hysterics. Ben Parr, a writer for the tech news site Mashable, embarrassed himself with the sort of full-throated hyperbole best suited for a monster-truck rally: “On Thursday, developers will be elated, users will be shellshocked, and the competition will look ancient. On Thursday, Facebook will be reborn. Prepare yourselves for the evolution of social networking.”

The changes that Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg announced to a conference of developers in San Francisco that Thursday were, at base, all about control. Users would be better able to control their so-called “social graph” by sequencing their data into timelines. News organizations could exert more control over their Facebook presence by publishing Facebook-specific editions of their content. And, by turning the site into a more immersive experience, Facebook furthered its ambitions to control every segment of online activity, from commerce to conversation. The conference at which Zuckerberg made the announcement was called f8, as in “Fate,” and, by the end of the presentation, observant web users had caught a glimpse of theirs.

Once dispersed organically across the wilds of the Internet, news content and online discourse are consolidating onto platforms operated by a few tech companies—Google, the world’s most ambitious microscope; Twitter, the hyperkinetic modern version of the telephone party line; Facebook, Apple, Amazon, a few others. They are subsuming their competitors and adding users at a gluttonous rate. By controlling the social dissemination of data, they are poised to become the primary information sources of the digital age.

These companies have brought functionality and efficiency to a realm that is often confusing. They have reinvented the means by which ordinary people interact with and relate to the news and one another. They have made it easier for people to find stories and news sources of interest to them, and share that material with other interested parties. They have, in many ways, simplified their users’ lives.

But such convenience and efficiency comes at a cost. These digital gorgons now loom so large that content producers cannot avoid their shadow. The traffic they direct and attention they command is so great that, for publishers, to ignore them is to court obscurity and potential irrelevance. In a previous era, media proper-

ties were the primary points of access to information and opinion relevant to their respective communities, much to the dismay of certain interest groups and constituencies whose issues went unreported and voices went unheard. Now we have swapped one set of media gatekeepers for another—a handful of multi-billion dollar tech companies that aim to profit by hosting the digital commons.

The question is whether they’re up to the task. Some claim that Facebook and its cohort have crippled the open web—that unregulated bastion of independent thought and untrammeled communications—by encouraging people to become data sharecroppers on their vast digital plantations. The doomsayers are perhaps overstating their case. The open web continues to exist, after all, and is not hard to find, even if you don’t know what you’re looking for. But it is safe to say that the rise of the new digital behemoths portends the decline of the maker culture that once defined the Internet, as people are encouraged to become data consumers rather than creators. It means that a significant number of people will come to spend the bulk of their online time inside a circumscribed Internet characterized by limited functionality and bland ambition. And it likely spells an end to the idealistic notion that true disintermediation—the removal of the informational middleman—could play a relevant part in any given future for news.

This has real implications for journalism. The future of a well-informed public is tied to the future of the open web, and the future of journalism is tied to the future of a well-informed public. Publishers, feverishly grasping for anything that might palliate their ailing budgets, are jostling to join hands with Big Social. Yet as ostensible champions of free thought and expression, they should be guarding the health of the independent web as fiercely as they guard their own editorial prerogatives.

IN THE NEARLY EIGHT YEARS SINCE IT was founded by Harvard undergraduates as a way for students at elite colleges to discreetly stalk each other under the guise of friendship, Facebook has grown at an enviable and perhaps un-

paralleled pace. The service claims 800 million active users, who spend more time on it than on Yahoo, Google, AOL, YouTube, and Twitter combined; its valuation has been estimated at one hundred billion dollars. When it finally goes public, its IPO will likely be the most successful in the history of Wall Street.

Facebook will lead to a more informed public, but not to a better-informed one.

How did a frivolous website with few apparent practical applications come to so disproportionately overshadow the American digital economy? By tapping into the fundamental human need to communicate with other people; by allowing you to stay in touch with everyone you've ever known, all at the same time, without having to call them or send them Christmas cards or remember the names of their children. Facebook utilizes the power of networks to provide the most useful tool for easy sociability in generations. And, as it does so, it rejects the lessons of the living web.

The World Wide Web is and was an unregulated, unconfined space where anyone with a network connection can declare and discuss his passions and interests, no matter how esoteric. When first popularized in the 1990s, it fostered an independent culture of creation and collaboration; in it, some saw an opportunity to democratize the means of content production, to bring about an era of thick participation in news and knowledge transmission.

And yet, as time passed, for every person who joined the web eager to create content and share expertise, there were dozens who joined the web because it was on their work computers. Facebook's great genius was in realizing that most people wanted less from the web; that they primarily wanted a place where they could chat and kill time without having to worry about

downloading programs or chancing viruses. So Facebook offered people the cruise-ship version of the Internet—a slick, brightly colored destination for social activities and bonhomie, safely apart from the unfamiliar surrounding waters, a service-oriented environment where you can lean back and enjoy the attentions of your very own information valet. You could leave the ship, but there's no need to—friends, information, activities, they're all already there, and if they're not they'll be there soon.

A few caveats apply. You can't steer the ship. You can't see how it works. You can't suggest destinations or routes, and you're not likely to cruise beyond your comfort zone. You can't easily meet people who aren't already like you. If something goes wrong, you're not allowed to fix it; if you're displeased with the service, nobody will listen to your complaint.

Facebook succeeds by disempowering its users, most of whom did not realize they were ceding powers that they had never actually exercised. Daunted by and suspicious of a decentralized communications medium that gave them unlimited choices, these new web viewers found themselves willing to swap freedom for a more coherent online experience; more than willing to accept Facebook's limitations and reductive emotional grammar, because the site is free, usable, and everyone else is already there.

THOUGH THE COMPANY MIGHT NOT define itself as such, its users have certainly come to think of Facebook as a news source—a place they come to get data and information of external and personal import. And so it's worth ex-

amining how Facebook differs from the sorts of news outlets we already know.

For all of their flaws, and they are many, most substantial news organizations have always taken seriously the goal of fostering a better-informed public. The news they reported was deemed to be of some wider importance, and the way in which they presented it was a sign of its importance. *This* was stuff you needed to know if you wanted to accurately apprehend the world and become a better citizen. You can challenge the way that news organizations did that job; you can challenge their arrogance, their limitations, the viewpoints they excluded. The point is that the act of making that judgment was a civic function as important as reporting the news in the first place.

Facebook rejects this notion. It traffics in informational relativism. An update from a friend, an update from a newspaper, an update from a shoe store—they trickle down the same news feed, differentiated only by vague algorithmic alchemy, and it's up to you to assess their relative levels of importance.

Facebook exemplifies the much-touted "platform" model for social news—platform in the Bughouse Square sense, a raised stage on which stand millions of people, tightly clustered, shouting to one another about everything and nothing in particular. And just as a soapbox does not critique the speeches delivered by its standees, Facebook refrains from judging its data, instead letting its users decide to whom they should listen.

The open web is also a platform. But the web is also a decentralized, non-commercial entity; Facebook, analyzed and data-mined to exhaustion, only pre-

LOCAL,
LOCAL,
LOCO!



tends to be such. The Internet itself *cannot* judge quality, though its users are free to invent filters that do so. Facebook *does not* judge quality.

The site gives its users crude tools—you can hide or unfollow an individual or an organization—which offer few levels of nuance. The platform itself provides no good way for its users to assess whether what they’re getting at any given time is relevant, intelligent, or accurate. You can rely on the reputation of the source providing the updates, of course, but you can’t assume that that source will remain on topic or provide relevant info. You can’t yourself assign a specific value to a source or to a piece of information, and you can’t consider the value that other users have assigned to a source or a piece of information, other than by the comments or “likes” that it has received. Facebook passes the buck on passing judgment.

The news media have long been criticized for the down-the-middle mentality of much of their reporting, which treats one source the same as another and leaves it up to the reader to decide who’s right. The “news feed” as a medium is similarly flawed.

There are real-world civic consequences to this sort of false equivalence, and new news structures need to understand this and account for it, rather than abdicating responsibility in favor of some pandering slogan about putting the media in the hands of the people. A great idea! But the necessary next step involves giving them the tools and education they need to shape and make sense of it. Without that next step, where’s the real improvement?

Over the past several weeks, a movement called Occupy Wall Street has garnered a lot of attention for its protests at the financial districts of cities across the United States. The protests are fueled by a general dissatisfaction with income inequality and the state of the American economy, and rage at the perceived greed of the financiers and corporations that accept bailouts and big salaries while extending no succor or mercy to the people whose jobs they eliminate and houses they foreclose on.

Occupy Wall Street, at least among the people in my circle, gets a lot of attention and support on Facebook. It co-

ordinates many of its events using Facebook. And it is a metaphor for the flaws inherent in Facebook.

You can think of Occupy Wall Street as a platform for dissent. A lot of people have swarmed to its protests, which have become a means by which these people and others can express their anger with and opinions about the state of the nation. The movement has gotten a lot of people talking about issues. But, as of yet, it has done very little to promote specific understanding of these issues—of how, exactly, the problems facing our country came to be, and how they might be fixed. Occupy Wall Street is a leaderless movement, and, as such, will have trouble honing its blunt emotion into specific, actionable points. It may inspire various higher-ups to take definite action, but those actions will not be devised by the people.

Facebook is raising awareness of news like Occupy Wall Street is raising awareness of issues, insofar as they’re both raising awareness that (some) news exists and (some) issues exist. The difference is that Facebook itself is in prime position to be an informational leader. It would not be impossible for Facebook to program a function that would let its users identify the most-trusted, most-verifiable updates on any given topic from any given source; it would not be difficult for Facebook to let interested users do this work for them. But Facebook has shown little interest in anything other than being all things to everyone; little interest in empowering its everyday users to participate in the news in any way other than “Like.” Link. Comment. Click.

It’s hard to see this vision of social news as any sort of informational evolution for which we should eagerly prepare ourselves. It’s not leading to greater precision or better data or more widespread understanding. And if specific understanding isn’t your goal, then, in the end, you’re just standing on the banks of the commons, spitting into the river of news. The social function of news is to give people things to talk about. The civic function of news is to make its users better citizens. Facebook excels at the first and fails, miserably, at the second. It will lead to a more informed

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public. But there's no reason to think that it'll lead to a better-informed public.

AS ATTENTION CONTINUES TO CONSOLIDATE on these sites, we're facing what can be termed the Walmartization of the web. For those foreign readers unfamiliar with the pride of Bentonville, Walmart is a discount chain retailer that builds its massive, ugly stores on the outskirts of towns, undercuts local merchants' prices and drives them out of business, and leaves residents with one choice of where to shop and manufacturers with one choice of where to sell their goods. You can get a lot of big brand names at Walmart, but don't look for anything of real quality. Still, the stores are so big, and there's so much there, that once you're inside it's often difficult to leave.

The web is moving toward something similar, where there'll be a handful of huge sites that draw big crowds and offer big brands but show no interest in working with or featuring material from smaller organizations.

And, like Walmart, these big sites will see the public primarily as consumers, not partners. The open web enables and encourages the prospect of collaboration between disparate parties—the powerful and the ordinary, the notorious and the obscure; it makes it easy for dispersed and heretofore-unlinked constituencies to learn from each other and evolve in different ways.

Facebook lets people collaborate, too, in a sense; on it, people make connections, organize events, and plot to resuscitate Betty White's career. But those collaborations are technically bland and functionally limited, and there's always the pos-

sibility that Facebook's going to pull the plug on your poster party, for whatever reason. If you're meeting in somebody else's house, the homeowner will always have the power to tell you to leave, or to have you evicted for trespassing.

In this, the site is little different from the monopolistic legacy news sources whose role in the world it has come to assume; whose readers couldn't easily improve papers or play a role in their operations, in making them better. This galls because the web had a chance to shake out differently, and it's disappointing that we reverted so soon to the old, closed model.

In a very real sense, the web was a critique of the way that power and expertise tend to consolidate in the hands of profit-minded organizations. The web, at its best, was a medium without a middleman, one that let people substantively connect with one another without having to go through a profit-minded mediator. And even if ninety-nine percent of them wasted or ignored that power, the remaining one percent were helping to evolve news and communications into a fundamentally new format.

There are still people doing this out on the open web—adding meaning, context, and expertise to any given discussion; building things, innovating, learning from their mistakes. But the state of the web today is such that it is becoming very difficult for any individual or group of individuals to act without relying on big organizations.

In the end, the stronger Facebook grows, the weaker the rest of the web becomes. In a gloomy article for *The Guardian* published soon after Facebook

announced its changes, Adrian Short mourned the demise of the open web: "We need to use social networks to get heard and this forces us into digital serfdom. We give more power to Big Web companies with every tweet and page we post to their networks while hoping to get a bit of traffic and attention back for ourselves. The open web of free and independent websites has never looked so weak."

NEWS ORGANIZATIONS WASTED A LOT of time wringing their hands about the Internet and wishing it would disappear. Unsure what could be done with it, and unwilling to consider any implications other than those involving the bottom line, they stood on tenterhooks; faced with the prospect of a communications revolution, they closed their eyes and pretended it wasn't there.

Now, playing catch-up, they're being told to embrace all forms of social media with the credulity and verve of a toddler hoping to curry favor with a mall Santa; that they must integrate their operations with Facebook if they are to maximize traffic and effectively engage and build an online community.

There are lots of reasons why extreme Facebook integration is a bad idea. Yes, it ultimately imperils your traffic by making your site too dependent on the social graph's good graces, and yes, the way Facebook collects data about its users is creepy and invasive, and yes, if you think about it, it makes no sense to forgo building a strong community that's engaged with your site and cares about and participates in your initiatives in favor of grasping after a weak community that can be induced to spend two seconds "liking" your organization and having its news updates buried among the hundreds of other updates that come across every single day.

But, primarily, Facebook and news organizations have few common values, and news organizations that become too integrated risk losing the very things that made them vital.

Facebook and its peers are the companies on top right now. They may or may not fall and be replaced with other companies. It's the model they represent that's the real concern; the model



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Dennis F. Giza, Acting Publisher, 9/27/11

that says, in the end, power ought to consolidate; that accessibility trumps utility; that, like the phoenix, precision will magically rise out of indiscriminate flames.

The open web needs a champion, and news organizations should be the ones to brandish that sword. Online news sites should become beacons for experimentation, conveners of authority; they should become spaces that foster the kind of perspective and expertise that Facebook circumscribes, and the collaboration that Facebook disallows. Theoretically, this would fortify both parties, and would help news organizations remake themselves into powerful alternative platforms for community-driven news.

Practically, what might this mean?

1. Give your users prominent space to substantively interact, express themselves, and participate in the genesis and dissemination of news. Include people in your reporting projects, and facilitate connections between those who would like to collaborate among themselves.

2. Comb the web for people experimenting with news—building databases or analytical tools, writing programs that might have some news application, pursuing one-off projects designed to last for the lifespan of the event they were created to analyze and record. Promote these efforts. Critique them with an eye toward improving them. Integrate them into your own site and encourage the experimenters to use your site to disseminate their work.

3. Devote sections of your site to training users in news and computer literacy, which is key if we are to grow a generation of responsible digital citizens. Make yourself into a place where people can go to learn how to read and evaluate a news story; offer tutorials on computer programming. Give engaged citizens the tools to become articulate participants in any given discussion.

4. Encourage and cultivate productive dissent. Make it easy for people to explain what you're doing wrong and how it could be done better; consider and respond to these critiques. Illuminate your internal workings in a way that a hundred-billion-dollar company would never illuminate its own.

At base, at their best, news organizations have always wanted to responsibly inform and thereby empower individuals to become assets to their communities.

By turning their websites into hubs for collaboration, experimentation, education, and dissent, news organizations can extend their pursuit of that goal and advance a true vision for the future of social news.

AT THE F8 CONFERENCE THIS September, Mark Zuckerberg called the changes that he introduced “an important next step to help tell the story of your life.” Helping people tell stories is a laudable goal, certainly, but what does it actually mean?

News organizations, for all their flaws, have always held high the notion of the story as a useful, powerful, sacred thing. Stories told thoughtfully and disseminated widely can and have changed the world. Mark Zuckerberg also wants to change the world—and the evidence indicates that he wants to change it into a blander, more homogeneous place, where people express themselves within limits and are reduced to their affinities and preferences; where stories double as market-research reports; where everybody knows something about one another; and where Facebook knows everything about everyone and uses that knowledge to enrich itself in manifold uncomfortable ways.

The story of digital news, as told so far, seems to be leading to an equally bleak denouement. Yet there's still time to write a better ending. News organizations must not allow slogans and corporate blandishments to take the place of true, collaborative innovation; they must find ways to use digital media to its best extent, rather than enabling its disfigurement for the sake of a few extra click-throughs. The open web and all it represents will wither if there is nobody to tend it; the news as a public good will not survive if its future rests in the hands of people who don't actually care about the news. **CJR**

JUSTIN PETERS is CJR's managing editor/web and also edits CJR's Ideas & Reviews section in the print magazine. He was a co-founder of Polite magazine.

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Daily Camera (Boulder, CO) 4/19/08

Four More Newspapers Switch to Offset; Conversion Is Not Always Smooth

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The Sun (Lowell, MA) 5/26/82

Attorney G. Clinton Gaston and Nicole Tate, one of the women named in the civil rights actions suit against the Chicago Police Department explain the gruesome accounts of what she encountered during a *Chicago Defender* interview.

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Rutland (VT) Herald 4/14/86

"All the President's Men" (8 p.m. NBC). One of the many triumphs of this spellbinding political thriller about the Watergate-related events leading to the resignation of President Nixon is that the audience is constantly fascinated and involved. Jason Robards gives his best film performance in years as the editor while Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman come when we learn at long last who actually did shoot J.R.

The Register-Guard (Eugene, OR) 11/8/80

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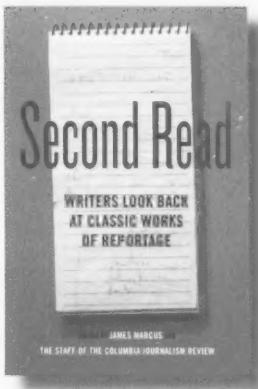
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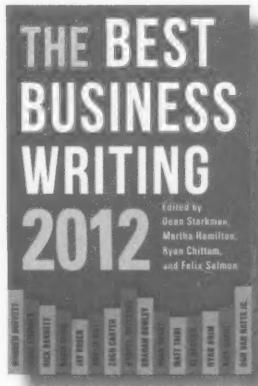
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